

THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

A PRACTICAL EXPOSITION OF ST. MATTHEW v.-vi. 8.

(INCLUDING THE BEATITUDES)

BY

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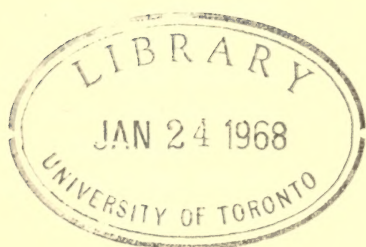
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THE MANIFESTO OF THE
KINGDOM

BY REV. W. J. TOWNSEND, D.D.

THE MANIFESTO OF THE KINGDOM

“He opened His mouth and taught them.”—MATTHEW v. 2.

MATTHEW gives the Sermon on the Mount as one continuous address. Luke records portions of it separately, and brings the various parts into connection with incidents which may derive illustration from them. Much controversy has been raised as to the locality and the circumstances under which the teaching of the Saviour was given.

It is disputed by some as to whether the sermon was delivered at one time, or whether Matthew gathered up fragments of discourses uttered by Christ at different times, and wove them skilfully into one systematic discourse. These are not vital issues, and need not detain us now. Surveying the evidence, as a whole, the best authorities consider that the sermon was preached as a whole, as given by Matthew; but that portions were repeated by Christ on fitting occasions. Than this, nothing would be more likely or more fitting. But

far more important issues are to be considered now.

There is no clear evidence as to the locality where Christ spoke. Certainly it was not far from Capernaum; and the tradition, accepted by many travellers, that He sat at the foot of one of the horns of Hattin, a hill about nine miles west of Tiberias, and which Dean Stanley says so strikingly coincides with the Gospel narrative, as almost to force him to conclude that this must have been the chosen spot, may fairly be accepted. If so, it was an attractive scene for such an occasion. The blue waters of the lake shimmered brightly before the people, the cloudless sky of the Orient shone overhead, the sublime form of Hermon swelled vast to heaven in the far north, and the glorious harvest fields of Esdraelon stretched themselves to the south. Seated on a rock, which some sanguine excursionists profess to identify, with the chosen band of apostles near Him, and a varied crowd stretching over the green sward, the Son of Man and Son of God "opened His mouth and taught them."

It was nearly eighteen months since He began His public ministry. Startling movements and events had aroused widespread and eager curiosity towards Him. He had called and commissioned the disciples, had purged the temple of the money-changers and the cattle merchants, had taught much in public and private, had wrought startling miracles of healing, had made bold and frequent claims to be the long-

expected Messiah, and thus had challenged the attention of friends and foes. His friends were legion, for "the common people heard Him gladly." His enemies were influential and wealthy; they were described by the Psalmist long before: "The rulers take counsel together against the Lord and His anointed," and even now sought to kill Him.

It was therefore "the fulness of time," when He must consolidate the preparatory work He had been engaged in. He must dig deep and lay well the foundations of the kingdom He had come from heaven to establish. Therefore He gave to man, at the crisis of His ministry, and of the world's history, this perfect example of constructive legislation. It contained the basal principles and morals of the new Church. It was the proclamation of the kingdom by the King Himself, and it was the Magna Charta of the Christian's faith.

The leading features of this unique utterance are worthy of being carefully studied. They emphasise its essential greatness, and help us to appreciate its lofty position as a manifesto of a new régime and dispensation.

I.

Its naturalness and simplicity.

It is an entire contrast to all other legal or philosophic literature. The style is not obscure,

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like that of Plato; nor metaphysical, like that of Aristotle. The substance is not confused and confusing, like the Digest of Theodosius, or the Pandects of Justinian. It is a systematic statement covering the principles and practice of religious life, whether private, social, or national, yet it is comprised within the space of a four-paged tract. The Pandects contained more than four thousand particulars, but this brief code gathers up laws, directions, precepts, and principles covering all the relations of human life. It does not contain a technical word, it has no crabbed legal phrase, there is no obscure terminology. The whole of the language is idiomatic, simple, and transparent. It is easy and familiar as that of a nursery tale. "The wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein." The simple and unsophisticated do not err therein. Some stumble at the statements of this sermon who are blinded by prejudice, or warped by unhealthy environment, or influenced by self-interest. But the poor in spirit, the weary of heart, the pure-minded, and the sorrowful, find it to be delightfully easy to comprehend, and drink in with avidity its direct and satisfying teachings. The sentences as they flow from the Saviour's lips are as free as the breathings of a mountain zephyr, and as unconventional as the rollings of a billow upon the shore.

II.

Originality.

Not but that the roots of much that Christ taught may be found in the ancient classics. Confucius, Socrates, Cicero, Seneca, gave utterance to many sentiments and precepts resembling the sayings of Christ. The old Jewish Rabbis, Hillel and Shammai, left golden moral sentences behind of similar teaching; and in the writings of Moses, the Psalmists, and the Prophets, are found noble axioms and apophthegms which approach in some degree to the fuller teachings of Jesus. How much these had been prompted by "the spirit of Christ which was in them," cannot now be considered, but Jesus seized and embodied in His system many truths which had been shining as "broken lights of Him" in preceding ages.

The Christ did not stop where these great teachers stayed. He took up the riddle and expounded it. He started where they left off, and illustrated their wisdom with a completeness and definiteness they had never shown. Then He poured forth a flood of gracious wisdom which ancient sage or bard had never learned. It must always be remembered that Christ Himself by His spirit had been the inspirer of Moses, of David, and of Isaiah. Indeed, we may

go further than this, and say that He, by the same spirit, moved in the hearts of Zoroaster, of Confucius, of Buddha, and of Socrates. If their enlightenment was not so full as that of Jewish seers, there may have been, nay, there was, a degree of inspiration given to the teachers of the heathen world, so that men were nowhere left without a witness for God, of which Christ was the fountain. Even then "there was the true light, even the light which lighteth every man coming into the world" (John i. 9), and to special leaders He vouchsafed a fuller measure of wisdom and truth than to the crowd.

But while Christ utilised and adapted some truths that had been in part announced previously to the world, He went far beyond all other religious teachers in the scope and comprehensiveness of His revelations. He poured, as from a full treasury, a flood of knowledge on human duty and destiny, on the nature and character of the Father, on the divine method of dealing with sin, and on the great problems of the future. But the uniqueness of His system lay chiefly in the fact that He Himself was the end of the law to righteousness to all who believe. He is the only founder of a religious system who has ever dared to say: "Whoso heareth these sayings of Mine, and doeth them, shall be likened unto a wise man which built his house upon a rock." No sage or prophet of the old world said "believe on Me," "come unto Me," "look unto Me," for salvation and eternal life. All others laid down schemes and

methods for self-saving, by mortifying the flesh, offering costly gifts on altars of sacrifice, or undertaking long and painful pilgrimages. But Christ presented Himself as the object of human faith, hope, and love, and He alone has proved an efficient helper and redeemer of humanity.

Following upon this He claimed from His followers absolute and unquestioning obedience. Never was such a demand made upon human nature. He required that the whole man should be surrendered to Him; that every thought should be brought into captivity to His obedience; that every action of the life should be done in accordance with His word. "For My sake," was to be the impulsive idea of the whole man. And this entire self-surrender was to be made by the exercise of the man's own will; it was, moreover, to be done, not by force, but in love. Christ will not have slaves to grace His throne. His kingdom is not one of constraint or force. It is a reign of tenderness, in which the subjects are drawn to the King by a devotion to His interests, and an enthusiasm for His service, which have no parallel on earth. The teaching, the laws, the administration of the kingdom of Christ, are original in their conception, and unique in their character.

III.

Spirituality.

The old law of the Jews dealt mainly with external rights and observances. It was a code of symbols, ceremonies, and external duties. There never was a system of law so exact in its requirements, or so multitudinous in its detail. In the early days of its administration, the spiritual inwardness of the law was kept prominent, and a healthy piety was cherished within the nation which found expression in the magnificent literature of the poets and seers of Judaism. But in the later days of the kingdom, after the return from the captivity, the spiritual fervour, especially of the priests and leaders, died out; and then, as is always the case, rites and ceremonies were multiplied, and religion became a yoke of external observances too intolerable to be borne. What existed in Judaism to a great extent prevailed everywhere. Religion had degenerated into a catalogue of outward duties, prayers to be recited, ablutions to be observed, sacrifices to be offered, monies to be paid, all of which could be punctiliously performed, while the heart remained uncleansed, and the life was unreformed.

Christ reversed the whole idea and requirements of religion. With Him it was not outward observance, but inward holiness; it was not washing of

the hands, but of the heart ; it was not the offering of money, but of love. Therefore, in the Sermon on the Mount, He addresses Himself purely to man's spiritual nature. The laws He promulgates appeal to the heart, the conduct He requires concerns the will, the emotions, and the affections, the kingdom He establishes is within, and touches the very thoughts and desires of the soul. Therefore all references to matters of dress, of gesture, of tricks of speech, of verbal repetition, of priestly lustration, or of formal legalities, are omitted. The subjects of the King are chosen and elected because of spiritual excellence. The qualities commanded are purely spiritual in their nature, the rewards and honours which are dispensed are altogether spiritual in their lustre and blessedness.

The spirituality of this great discourse gives to it elasticity and expansiveness. It fits itself to every man's needs, and to every relation and circumstance of human life ; and thus it becomes a touchstone for all questions of conscience, for all problems of social and national life, and for every experience, however varied, in each man's career. It is expansive in its influence on the nature of each individual who observes its precepts and requirements, seeing that every capability of our nature is enlarged and elevated thereby. Its effects on man's character are of the healthiest and noblest kind, and vindicate the incomparable grandeur of this divine manifesto.

IV.

Authoritativeness.

There was no trace of uncertainty in the tone of Jesus. Moses was the pre-eminent lawgiver of the old world, but he never assumed to speak in his own name. His constant formula in announcing commands or precepts was, "Thus saith the Lord." But Jesus constantly said, "I say unto you." He spake in His own name. He laid down the ultimate principles of religion and morality in the most definite form. There was no trace of uncertainty or of speculation, no appeal to higher wisdom, no hesitation as to his conclusions and decisions. In its positive declarations of truth, in its clear and simple exposition of the way of life, the teaching of the Sermon on the Mount was an entire contrast to the quibbles, the endless glosses, the feeble speculations, of the scribes and rabbis. Therefore the people listened with astonishment, and the verdict was, "He taught them as one having authority, and not as their scribes."

This marvellous utterance has borne the keen criticism and fiery scrutiny of nineteen centuries. Men and nations have risen or fallen as they have accepted or rejected its dictates or behests, as they have obeyed or disobeyed its precepts. It still stands in human literature, unapproached and

unapproachable in its simplicity of statement, purity of sentiment, loftiness of idea, and universality of range. It still stands, and will stand to the end of time as the standard of all moral and religious excellence, as the test of all practical effort in public or private life.

INTRODUCTION TO THE
BEATITUDES

BY REV. E. GRIFFITH-JONES, B.A.

INTRODUCTION TO THE BEATITUDES

“And He opened His mouth, and taught them, saying,
Blessed ——.”—MATTHEW v. 2.

THERE are three quests or objects of desire which all men are busily pursuing, either singly or in combination—pleasure, happiness, blessedness—and the object of our Lord in the Sermon on the Mount is to show that the third quest is the *summum bonum*, or supreme good of life. In other words, we have here a complete and rounded exposition of the Christian ideal of character, of the perfect human life. This high and beautiful programme stands here in the forefront of the Gospel. It is so lofty in its demands that our hearts sink within us as we look at it, and we whisper to ourselves,

“O snows so pure, O peaks so high,
I shall not reach you till I die !”

Yet is it so divinely beautiful, so alluring, so gently persuasive, that in our hours of vision we cannot

help saying, "That is what I was made for ; these are the native heights in which my soul exults and rejoices ; *that* is to be a man indeed !

“ ‘ And oh for a man to rise in me,
That the man I am may cease to be ! ’ ”

But in our ordinary hours and days, we are not able to look at this vision except as something as unattainable as it is beautiful. The world (I might almost say the Church) has yet to be persuaded of the possibility of living according to the Sermon on the Mount. "Somewhere—is it worlds away? sometime—is it æons hence?—this bright cloud will descend, and take shape in men and women on earth, as once it took shape in the Holy One and Just, whom evil men took and slew on the tree ; but for us, in the twentieth century, the ideal is not capable of realisation. 'It is high ; we cannot attain unto it.' The law of life as yet is struggle, effort, competition ; the survival of the strong, the aggressive, the unscrupulous. As well expect a flower to grow during the throes of an earthquake, as for this ideal character to take shape during the present turmoil of humanity. Some day the struggle will die down, and the era of the higher virtues will dawn, and then the Beatitudes will have their chance. Meanwhile, we can but distantly admire and tentatively touch their skirts here and there, as it were, and catch in rare moods a sense of their charm and truth ; and

pray that the good time may soon come when the poor in spirit, and the meek, and the peace-loving, and the gentle, will inherit and possess the earth; and when those who hunger and thirst after righteousness will be filled!" Is not this the real attitude of many of us towards the programme of conduct drawn up for us by Jesus Christ?

It will be my endeavour, in a series of discourses, to show that the picture drawn for us in this Sermon on the Mount—of which the Beatitudes give us a preliminary sketch—if it is ideal, is also profoundly imitable; and that it is not only a picture of the perfect life, but a practicable programme here and now. Like every ideal, it is beyond our perfect practice; but, like every true ideal, it is the point towards which our endeavours may growingly converge and approximate. If it be not so, then it is a dream. More than this I will try to show. This ideal has been at work in the world for nineteen hundred years, like a mustard seed, the smallest of seeds; like leaven, working mysteriously through the lump, making terribly slow, but absolutely sure, progress all the time, and destined to be at last the universal standard of human life. Every step of moral and social progress that history records during these centuries has been in the direction of these Beatitudes; and every year brings their ultimate triumph nearer. What has hindered them most in the past, and what hinders them most now, is not only

(perhaps not chiefly) the scorn of the world, but the faithlessness of the Church; not the fact that the materialist and the sceptic deny them, but that Christians, who profess them theoretically, neglect them practically. They would triumph to-morrow, if every man who pretends to believe in them would really practise them. And if so, how essential it is that we should understand them, and so be convinced of their truth! Let us see if we can together come a little nearer to "this consummation so devoutly to be wished."

But, first, let us glance at the picture as a whole, and view these Beatitudes in the light of some general considerations that will help us in dealing with them in detail.

I.

The Occasion.

It was formerly held by many that our Lord preached the Sermon on the Mount at the outset of His ministry, but it is now generally acknowledged that He had been publicly preaching and teaching for some months, possibly a year or more, before He gave this summary or outline of the doctrine of the kingdom of God as a whole. The question has also been raised whether the passages gathered together here were ever really uttered in a consecutive discourse. In St Luke we find these passages, and

others very like them, scattered over many chapters. I have no time here to go into the critical question ; but it seems to me very natural to suppose that, having sown the scattered seeds of His truth here and there, as occasion offered, our Lord, gathering His now closely welded group of disciples together, should give them a more united body of teaching before sending them abroad as His representatives, and that here we have the results of a kind of "Summer School" held towards the close of the first year of His ministry, these results being collected lovingly by the apostle who compiled the *Logia* or sayings, in which the first gospel is so rich. "Seeing the multitudes," He called out His disciples, and went with them up the slopes of an adjoining hill. Finding a suitable hollow or amphitheatre, He sat down on a little eminence where He could be well heard and seen, and began to talk to them ; and here we have the summary of what may have taken many hours—it may be days—of close instruction to deliver. But ere long the multitude He had left behind in the valley ventured to follow Him, and formed a large ring of listeners round the smaller one whom He was particularly addressing. The sermon, thus, was spoken to the Church, not to the world ; but, as "the multitudes" appear to have listened to it (*cf.* Matthew vii. 28), we may say that it was spoken into the ear of the Church, and overheard by the world.*

* *The Sermon on the Mount.* A Practical Exposition. By Chas. Gore. John Murray, 1896.

And the world, in the intervals of its scramble after pleasure, or money, or power, has been haunted by that aerial music ever since, and some day it will lay down its arms at discretion, and join the little company of disciples, sitting, clothed, and in its right mind at the feet of the Master, that it may listen to effect and be saved.

II.

The Background.

So much for the foreground, the occasion, and the audience. But there is a background also to this sermon. It comes in a long perspective, of which these Beatitudes are the spiritual climax.

We must connect the sermon with this background, if we are to understand it. Jesus was not speaking to minds totally unprepared, but to a people with a long religious history, who had had a severe and very definite spiritual training. He appeals to them as already in possession of great truths, and these truths are taken for granted in some cases, unfolded in others, and subjected to a careful and rigorous revision in others. The very terms He uses were familiar to His audience; God, the kingdom of heaven, righteousness, meekness, mercy—these great key-words were interwoven into the very tissue of their thinking. And so we have to go back

to the Old Testament, which was the Bible of the people who listened to the Sermon on the Mount, to find the root of the ideas of which it gives the flower and the fruit. To deal with the Beatitudes as though they were a programme of conduct dropped down from heaven on a startled and unprepared world, is to lose the key to their meaning altogether. "Ye have heard it from them of old," this is the background, the soil out of which these pure thoughts all grew—"but I say unto you"—this is the fair growth that sprang forth here. The "mind of the Master" embodies a revelation which is a growth as well as a discovery; and we must study the root if we would understand the sweet and lovely fruit it bore. We shall see how true this is as we go on.

III.

Some Characteristics.

Turning now to the group of sayings that begin with this word "Blessed," there are some further considerations that will help us to understand them more clearly, and to penetrate further into their pellucid depths.

I. *We have here the description of one ideal character, not of a group of individuals.*

Looking at these words cursorily, we might imagine that the kingdom of heaven is composed of various types of men, some of whom have one

characteristic, while others had other characteristics. This is to miss the lesson entirely. *It was a part of our Lord's oral method to present qualities by means of examples.* Instead of laying down a general rule, He gives a concrete instance of its application, and leaves His hearers to disentangle the rule from the particular case, and apply it for themselves. "This gave the hearers something to think of, as well as to remember, and the one process helped the other, besides taking them more intimately into the partnership of thought and action. The Sermon on the Mount is throughout pitched in this key of concreteness. Our Lord is there dealing with the general principles of conduct among those who are members of His kingdom. But instead of uttering abstractions, He passes a series of pictures before the eyes of His hearers. He bids them think, not of vague qualities, such as meekness, spiritual sensitiveness, long-suffering, patience, but of the people who embody these qualities." * More than this, the picture He draws in the Beatitudes is a kind of "composite portrait." We are to think, not of a group of individuals, some meek, others pure, others eager for righteousness, etc., but of an ideal type, which combines in one perfect character all these scattered qualities. A man who was "poor in spirit," and nothing else, would not be a proper subject of the kingdom. He must be that and these other

* *The Master and His Method*, by E. Griffith-Jones, B.A., p. 54.

things in proportion. He must be pure in heart, touched with the pathos and sorrow of life, meek under provocation, full of divine ardour for what is good, merciful as well as just, pure, peaceable, and patient. Each line adds something to the portrait, but the portrait is the sum of them all. How much cheap sarcasm against this and that solitary quality loses its sting when we remember this! How the ideal and perfect man looms up, grand and impressive, when we realise how many-sided, how rich in noble qualities, how rounded off in all perfection, he is!

2. *We must remember, however, that in this picture of the ideal character, there is much taken for granted as already familiar to those for whose benefit in the first instance it was drawn.*

It has been said in criticism of the picture that there are great and important gaps in it, that some of the root qualities of character are omitted, that therefore it is an imperfect type.

This criticism would have some valid basis were it not for the background of teaching to which I have already referred. Jesus, as I have said, was not speaking to men ignorant of fundamental moral teaching. What He did was to bring into prominence the final and determining qualities into which those already accepted as admirable ought to blossom. He takes for granted the great cardinal virtues which had already commended themselves to the moral judgment of men, "justice, temperance, prudence, and courage." On

these He erects His fair superstructure, as an architect would erect a rounded column on a square base. We can go further and say that these lower qualities are all implied here, as the root is contained in the flower. Without truth at its heart, meekness is weakness ; without justice as its basis, mercy is a mockery ; without deep passion for righteousness as its informing principle, wisdom is but worldly prudence ; and without patience, courage is but a brutal self-assertiveness. As bones are hidden in the soft flesh, so do the stronger and more masculine virtues run like a vertebral column through and behind these seemingly soft and yielding virtues, imparting strength to them, and receiving grace from them in turn. The character portrayed here as our type and ideal of the Christian man is compact of all the qualities known and admired by men, but clothed in the tender integuments and softer features of those gentle, chivalrous qualities that are peculiar to Christianity. It is manhood carried up to its highest terms, developed into its fairest possibilities.

3. Consider again the practical character of these Beatitudes.

We are all impressed (unduly so, I think) with the aloofness as well as loftiness of the standard of virtue which is set up for us in the Beatitudes ; we think of it as something

“too good
For human nature’s daily food.”

Let us remember that however high this standard is,

it is made up of every-day qualities, each of which is within the scope of the simplest honest man or woman. The picture is of heavenly grace and beauty; the pigments are all of the common earth. Just as the diamond is only carbon, subjected to some special pressures in the mysterious laboratory of nature, so the blessed life is only human nature shaped by the pressures of experience, and transformed by the alchemy of grace. Given the man and woman, whoever they may be, and whatever they may be at starting, who are willing to be entirely renewed, taught, and inspired by Jesus, this is the type of character to which they will at last conform.

This is the mental attitude in which I would have you join me in studying this lovely picture. Let us get the fact rooted deep in our conviction that the blessed life is not some far-away ideal to which only the exceptionally endowed, the naturally devout, can possibly attain, but a practical programme for ourselves. It may not be given to us to rise to an equal eminence in this glorious company of the elect, but we can all belong to the fellowship. "According to our faith, so shall it be to us." If we believe, we can attain; if we press on, we shall reach the goal. It is my joy to believe that here is an ideal which outsoars the brief scope of this life; that it contains depths and heights which we shall never fathom or climb on earth, and that eternity is needed for its perfect realisation. It is my joy also to believe that this blessed life is of a piece, whether in this life or the

next. The man who is in the way of attaining to it will not find his life-purpose broken short at death, but will begin yonder where he leaves off here ; it will be progress unbroken, growth unchecked, and in the life above he will bear the fruit of the seed which he sows in the life below. The sowing is often in tears ; the reaping will be in gladness and glory.

4. *And there is this one thing more. This ideal, if it is practicable for all, is also incumbent on all.*

The Beatitudes are no counsels of perfection for the few ; they are the rule of every day for the many. There is a foolish and mischievous way of talking about them. People say : " Yes, that is the programme of the Christian life, and those who profess it are bound to follow it. But I cannot pretend to profess it ; and therefore I am not bound by it." You cannot settle the question in that easy way. If you have once seen this ideal life, if you have once recognised its beauty and its loftiness, then you are bound by it hand and foot. You cannot pick and choose your ideals ; they are laid down for you by the fact of your being a man—a man with all the possibilities of sainthood latent in you—a man on whom has shined the Gospel light which has revealed those possibilities to you—a man, therefore, who, whether you profess the Christian standard or not, will have inevitably to be judged by the kind of response you are making to it. Do not say " This is a programme I cannot conform to, and I do not mean to try," for that will not excuse you in

the slightest. "We must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ," and that judgment-seat is the seat on which the Beatitudes sit to judge us all. Therefore let us see to it that we do not shut our eyes to their appeal, or shirk their inevitable call. For with the high demand comes the promised grace, and if we have to say "with man this blessed life is impossible," we must remember the Master's words, "but with God all things are possible," and if we give ourselves to be helped by Him, He will never leave us, nor forsake us, till we sit with Him on His throne. But if we would "reign with Him" we must also first be prepared to "suffer with Him."

POOR BUT RICH

BY REV. E. GRIFFITH-JONES, B.A.

POOR BUT RICH

“Blessed are the poor in spirit : for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”—MATTHEW v. 3.

IN the previous discourse I pointed out that in the Beatitudes, Jesus does not present us with a group of characters, but with a single type of character of which these qualities are so many sides or aspects. We have now to examine these typical qualities each for itself, always remembering the above consideration, through forgetfulness of which the Christian ideal has ever been in danger of being misunderstood, and even despised, by shallow critics and worldly cynics. It will be my earnest endeavour, as already stated, to show that the resultant type is not only admirable, but that it is the only perfect and manly type in existence—the fine essence and flower of our humanity developed to the highest possibilities.

I.

We are told at the outset of this pregnant summary, which is afterwards unfolded in detail in the Sermon on the Mount, and in the subsequent teaching of Christ, that the first great and essential characteristic of the Christian temper is *poverty of Spirit*. What are we to understand by this quality?

The word is unfortunately ambiguous, both in the original Greek and in the English translation. It has to be carefully defined and safeguarded if we would avoid a lamentable mistake at the outset of our study.

Let us then clearly understand that *poverty* of spirit does not mean *meanness* of spirit. We are to rid ourselves of the notion that cowardice, or inability to stand up for one's rights, or a tendency to give way to opposition as such, for lack of grit or vigour of character to resist it, has any place among the Christian virtues. As we go on with the study of the ideal here pictured forth, we shall see that it includes the noblest courage, the most persistent moral energy, and an unfaltering exercise of will. To pronounce a beatitude on servility and littleness of mind, would be impossible to our Lord Jesus Christ. He Himself was the perfect embodiment of the Beatitudes, and there has never been a man with so divine a courage, so unconquerable a spirit as He had.

After much pondering on this beautiful quality in view of the illustrations of it that abound in the Bible and in the biography, I find that there are three constituent elements in it.

1. *The first is a sense of detachment from earthly sources of satisfaction and happiness.**

The majority of mankind are almost entirely dependent on their surroundings, or their possessions, for their happiness. "Blessed are the rich, the people with a high position among men, those who have many friends, and are held in honour by the multitude," says the world at large. The mundane ideal is "to get all you can, and keep it." When a man has made himself master of the external sources of enjoyment, he is counted fortunate.

It is against this absorption in externalities, in the passing accidents of life—in a word, against worldliness—that this Beatitude is directed. The true man, according to the mind of Christ, is not the man who grasps at these things, but the man who holds them with a light and easy hand, and who, when he is called upon to let them go, does so without a pang, for they do not leave him resourceless, since he has others that the world knows not of.

We see here why Jesus so often spoke and acted as though He counted the poor more fortunate than the rich. It was not because physical poverty is in itself a boon—far from it; and not because wealth in itself is sinful; but the poor are at least removed

* Gore on the *Sermon on the Mount* (p. 24).

from the great besetting sin of the rich, which is to magnify the value of outward possessions, and to live as though these were an absolute condition of well-being. Whatever be the perils of poverty, this, at least, is not one of them. The poor man is by his very poverty exempt from the temptation of identifying life with what it possesses of outward good. It is easier for him to be "detached" in spirit; to be free from the tyranny of the instinct of ownership, so that he can give the passion of his soul to the pursuit of that "righteousness" which is the chief good of man. It is not easy, on the other hand, for a rich man to be detached in spirit: he is hemmed in by his riches, balked and hampered by the wealth of physical satisfactions by which he is surrounded, and by the vested interests that grow out of them; so that he has, as it were, to break away from his good fortune ere he can acquire the attitude of soul in which it is possible to be spiritually blessed. When Jesus said, "How hardly shall they that trust in riches enter into the kingdom of God," He was giving utterance to this great law of the spirit.

But as riches is no absolute bar to the blessedness of the kingdom, so poverty in itself is not enough. A poor man may be greedy, envious, and grasping in disposition; and a rich man may be humble and detached, and set on the highest things of God. "We have thus three states in which men may live and be called poor—the state of actual poverty, without the addition of poverty of spirit; the state of

those who are actually poor and poor in spirit, and the state of those who are poor in spirit and not actually poor." * Thus it is not physical poverty that settles the question one way or another; it is a certain attitude of the soul towards all external possessions. However rich or however poor we may be, as the world counts, our standing before God, our chance of entering the kingdom depends on whether our hearts are inwardly independent of both conditions. If we are called upon to sacrifice wealth, or the chance of wealth, for the sake of principle, for the retention of our self-respect, for the chance of serving God and our fellow-men, we must be willing to do so; and if we are willing to do so, with these high stakes in view, then we have that detachment of mind and will which makes the Beatitude of which we are speaking.

And this "detachment of soul" is not so rare as at first we are tempted to believe. I suppose that, in some respects, there is no profession so difficult to square with the Christian ideal as the military profession. And yet this quality of "detachment" is one of the first virtues of the soldier. He is to consider himself free at a moment's notice to give up all that is dear to him—home, comforts, wife, children, everything—to go at the call of his country into the jeopardies and privations of active service, taking his very life in his hands, and pledged to count it as a very small thing in comparison with

* *Sermon on the Mount*, p. 154 (H. J. Coleridge).

the duty of winning his country's battles. You cannot ask anyone to do more than this; and yet it is done every day, alike by the commanding General and the common soldier. Or take the case of a high-minded merchant. Such a man is often placed in a position in which he has to choose between strictly honourable dealing and the chance of sudden profit, sometimes even of absolute wealth. If he is a true man, he will not take a moment to choose his alternative, but will instantly prefer to retain his self-respect and the honour of his house, rather than to forfeit these for the sake of unrighteous riches. And there are points of honour in every respectable calling and profession where the same temptation comes home to us; and many a silent act of heroism is recorded in the Book of Days, in virtue of which a man—without saying a word about it—chooses loss and privation rather than succumb to the temptation.

But the highest instance the records of time contain of this spiritual detachment, is that contained in the second chapter of the Philippians, where it is said, "Have this mind in you, which was also in Christ Jesus, who being in the form of God, counted it not a prize"—not a thing to be grasped at and held—"to be on an equality with God, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a slave, being made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, becoming obedient, even unto death, yea, the death of the cross." Christ gave

up, not worldly wealth, not the resources of outward blessedness, but the very attributes of Deity, "that through this poverty we might be made rich."

Here then we find the first condition of this Beatitude, that we must be prepared to give up what most we lean upon, and love, and what in itself may be good for us to have, in order that we may become the children of God, and members of the brotherhood of Christ. We are to seek, first, the kingdom of God and His righteousness, refusing to be entangled in the cares of riches and the disabilities of poverty, that we may become freed men of that kingdom in reality as well as in name.

2. Detachment of soul, from outward things however is only the first ingredient in this "poverty of spirit" which is so blessed. The second element in it is like unto it—detachment of soul from self, and the righteousness of self.

How many a man finds it comparatively easy to feel independent of outward possessions, but he is full of self-esteem, and self-reliance, and subjection, and satisfaction. The motto of such a man is: "Find your resources in yourself, not what you have but what you are, is the supreme test of well-being." This was the Stoic ideal, as the dependence on outward sources of satisfaction was the Epicurean ideal. The Stoic taught that, deep down in a man's heart were to be found all the needful sources of greatness. "Trust yourself, rely on yourself, develop yourself, find in that inner world of strength and reflection and

discipline, all that goes to the making of the blessed life," that was his creed. It was a creed which was based on the inherent dignity of human nature.

And it was a creed with only one fault, but that fault is a fatal one. It took for granted that human nature was self-complete, a little *cosmos* in itself, a world which could be reduced to perfect order by a readjustment of its internal resources. It appealed to man as a "being who, if not perfect, was capable of a self-realised perfection."

Against this conception of human nature the Bible is one long protest. "Man is not only an imperfect, but a sinful being"—that is its ground of appeal. He has lost the way to perfection, and is incapable of recovering it by the exercise of any inherent faculty and effort. Trying to attain, or to regain, this perfection, is an attempt that must for ever prove abortive, because the very will which alone could attain it is diseased and cankered. And therefore the sin of sins is self-trust, which is self-righteousness. There is the "proud" man of the psalms, who is ever held up to the scorn of the truly pious and religious man. "Him that hath an high look and a proud heart will I not suffer." And the opposite is the man of humble and contrite heart, whom God "will not despise." Right through the history of Israel we can see these opposing types of men struggling for a place in the national mind. The one issued ultimately in the Pharisee, whose idea of prayer was self-praise, and the other in the Publican, who, when he prayed,

would not so much as lift up his eyes unto heaven, but said : "Lord be merciful to me a sinner." This man was truly poor in spirit, "whose heart was not haughty, and whose eyes were not lofty," but who confessing his sinfulness and his inadequacy to reach righteousness, abased himself before God.

3. *This brings us to the third element in poverty of spirit—a great spiritual receptivity.*

To detach oneself from the mere externalities of life, and to confess our lack of inward resources—this is not enough. Are we so poor, and would we become truly rich? Then we must do more than detach and abase ourselves. We must open our hearts to whatever source of spiritual wealth may be open to us. We must be teachable, impressionable, dependent on God, the infinite source of power and goodness and grace. We must enclose our hearts heavenward, and wait for what may come to us thence. We must open our window daily towards the heavenly Jerusalem. Our hope and joy is not in earth, not in self, but in Him who made us, and who would redeem us. And so the motto of the poor in spirit is not "trust in riches," nor "trust in self," but "trust in God" "who is the health of our countenance, and our God."

When we come to this point, we can see how this Beatitude, "Blessed are the poor in spirit," links itself with all that was distinctive in the Old Testament religion as well as in the New. The Psalms, the book of Job, the prophets, and the galaxy of noble men

who fill the gallery of Old Testament portraits, all illustrate it: "Delight thyself also in the Lord, and He shall give thee the desires of thine heart. . . . Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him"; "For in Thee, O Lord, do I hope; Thou wilt answer, O Lord God"; "Show me Thy ways, O Lord, teach me Thy paths, guide me in Thy truth and teach me; for Thou art the God of my salvation; on Thee do I wait all the day." We might cover many pages in enriching these quotations from that mine of piety—the Hebrew psalter. It is a conception of life derived from a sense of the spiritual poverty of man, and the wealth and nearness of God to the humble of heart. It is the spirit of the poor man, not that he may be feeble and of no account, but that God may fill him with Himself, and so make him rich indeed.

And this is true greatness, in all lands and ages. Everywhere the elect souls have been those who have looked away from earth, and away from self, and have been filled with the vision of God. From the dim valleys and hills of the Old Testament comes the prayer of the poor of spirit: "Whom have I in heaven but Thee? And there is none on earth that I desire beside Thee." And from the brighter plains and more glorious heights of the New comes the clearer refrain: "And such confidence have we through Christ to Godward—not that we are sufficient of ourselves to account anything as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is from God, who also

made us sufficient as ministers of the New Covenant ; not of the letter, but of the spirit ; for the letter killeth, but the spirit maketh alive." And ever since, the highest place in the ranks of nobility have been those who have followed in this noble, apostolic, and prophetic succession, of men who have had a mean sense of self, and a great grasp of the Most High, and who, as Emerson said, confessed that " they are nothing, because God is all."

II.

It is now needful to say something about the second part of this Beatitude—the promise that is linked to it—"for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

Is it not clear that this must be so? Can the heavenly kingdom of grace belong to any one else? Can it fail to come to such as these? Here is no arbitrary promise, but a logical conclusion. Heaven is theirs who fulfil the condition of receiving it into their hearts, and this only the poor in spirit can do.

But in closing, let us see how instantly the Master's words were justified historically. Who were those who entered the kingdom, and became the freedmen of Christ?

When He came on earth, the nation was divided

into many parties and classes, but they might all be finally separated into two, and only two.

On the one side there was the ruling class, composed of the hierarchy, priests, scribes, Pharisees, Saducees, whose chief characteristic was their reliance on the externalities of life on the one side, and on the other a high estimate of their own virtues and character. They were, many of them, men of high probity and outstanding excellencies. They tithed mint and anise and cummin, and were punctilious beyond measure on the trifles which in their view of life made perfection. And yet, with all this solicitude for non-essentials, they omitted the "weightier matters of the law—judgment and mercy and faith." The final condemnation of their attitude is seen in this—that when the perfection which they sought came to them in incarnate form, they did not know Him, but rejected and slew "the Prince of Life."

But there was a small minority of the nation who stood out in marked contrast to this class. Most of them were poor and unlettered men. But if they had no wealth and little culture, they were rich in humility and in faith. They were deep students of the Scriptures, and their hearts were filled with the great and blessed hope of the kingdom therein outlined and promised. They formed the devout and pious section of the community, whose lives were spent in simple-hearted meditation and prayer, and the earnest performance of their religious duties. To this group belongs that attractive list of men and

women who figure in Luke's account of the Nativity—Zacharias and Elizabeth, Simeon and Anna, and above all, the pure maiden who was privileged to be the Mother of Our Blessed Lord, and whose Magnificat breathes of the essential spiritual attitude of the type to which she belonged.* From this class also Jesus drew almost all His disciples (see John i. 35-51, etc.), and most of His general adherents; and it is to men of similar spiritual temperament and circumstances that St Paul refers when he says to the Corinthians: "For behold your calling, brethren, how that not many wise after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: but God chose the foolish things of this world, that He might put to shame them that are wise, etc." (1 Cor. i. 26-31).

Thus do we find that our Lord's first Beatitude was justified and honoured by the historical results of the preaching of His Gospel. "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of God." It is theirs because they alone are of that spiritual temperament—humbly receptive, eager for the things of God—which is capable of realising and appreciating its blessings. And what was true of the first age of Christianity has been substantially true of the succeeding ages. The blessings of the kingdom have always been theirs whose hearts are keyed to its appeal, and none others have received it. Because poverty is more often associated with this religious temper, and because wealth tends on the

* See note on page 46, 47.

whole to stifle it, we find that the great and the wise and the mighty are largely outside the kingdom, while it still appeals mainly to such as have not fallen under the temptations of riches and worldly power. Whether we are rich or poor, let us see to it, dear brethren, that we belong to this class, so that we may be among those who will receive the kingdom and its blessedness in fulness of joy.

NOTE.

Dr Sanday, in his article "Jesus Christ" in Hastings' *Dictionary of the Bible*, calls this class the "special seed-plot of Christianity." He points out that we must seek for the affinities of the New Testament faith the more clearly the farther we recede from the centre of official Judaism, and among those who found their spiritual food in the psalms and prophets rather than in the written or oral law. "It has been observed that there is a group of psalms (of which perhaps ix., x., xxii., xxv., xxxv., xl., lxix., cix. are the most prominent) in which the words translated, 'poor,' 'needy,' 'humble,' 'meek,' are of specially frequent occurrence. It appears that these words have acquired a moral meaning. From meaning originally those who are 'afflicted' or 'oppressed' (by men), they have come to mean those who in their oppression have drawn nearer to God and leave their cause in His hands. They are the pious Israelites who suffered from the tyranny of the heathen, or of their worldly countrymen, and who refuse to assert themselves, but accept in a

humble spirit the chastening sent by God." These people were to be found mainly in the provinces, and notably in Galilee. It is clearly these of whom Luke is thinking in his version of the Beatitudes as being specially addressed by our Lord. The word "poor," in Luke vi. 20, is used in this specialised sense, and so falls into line with the version in the first Evangelist, where "in spirit" defines the class more particularly. See also on this subject Professor Bartlet's *The Apostolic Age*, introduction, pp. xlvii-liv, where under the heading of "The New Germ" the same type of character is described more at length. These considerations dispose entirely of the objection that there is any real inconsistency between the two versions of the sermon given in the Gospels.

SORROWFUL YET GLAD

BY REV. E. GRIFFITH-JONES, B.A.

SORROWFUL YET GLAD

“Blessed are they that mourn.”—MATTHEW v. 4.

THIS is undoubtedly the hardest of the Beatitudes to understand, and therefore to believe. At first sight it seems to embody a spirit of pessimism altogether out of keeping with our Lord's teaching elsewhere. It looks like putting a premium on gloom. One critic has called it the “Beatitude of Despair.”

Other commentators, more earnest and sympathetic, have felt obliged to lessen the force of the saying, in order to make it harmonise with the place given in the gallery of Christian virtue to hope. They say Jesus is here thinking only of the down-trodden people of God. They were surrounded by enemies who oppressed them without pity, and who rejoiced in their sufferings and discomfiture. The “hope of Israel” was dead; all they could do was to mourn at the sorrowful contrast between the glorious times of old, and the degenerate to-day; and to them Jesus brought a message of comfort, He gave them fresh grounds of confidence, He preached the Gospel of the kingdom of God to them, He opened the ivory gate

of hope to their wailing, despairing hearts. As it is put in Luke, "Blessed are ye that weep now ; for ye shall laugh." According to this view, Jesus was speaking not a general law of the religious life, but uttering a precept appropriate to the time and the audience. It was the Beatitude not of despair, but of compensation.

I have a very clear conviction that in our Lord's words we can always see a special reference to the surroundings and the people to whom He spoke. If we grasped this fact more fully, we should not go astray so often in our interpretation of His teaching. At the same time, His words are for all ages ; through the passing allusion, and beneath the crust of temporary application, we have to dig to the eternal nugget of truth, which is always to be found. We cannot therefore put aside this difficult utterance "Blessed are they that mourn" as though it were an *obiter dictum*, or a precept having only a restricted and local application. Unless we are to lose all its meaning *for us*, we must penetrate deeper and grasp the underlying principle, and if we do so without fear or hesitation I do not doubt the result. We shall see that Jesus was no pessimist, but the preacher of everlasting hope and joy, and that His saddest utterance in one sense is really but the underside of a divine optimism.

I.

Mr William James in his Gifford Lecture, "The Varieties of Religious Experience," gives a description of two types of religion which bears strongly on our subject, and throws not a little light on its difficulties. These are, on the one side, what he calls "the religion of healthy mindedness," and on the other hand, "the religion of the sick soul."

By the "religion of healthy mindedness" this robust philosopher of the soul means the religion of natural optimism. There are souls that are congenitally happy in their view of life. They have an obstinate bent on that side. They take rosy views of the world, and of providence, and of men. They walk on the sunny side of things ; carrying a sunshine in their hearts which touches even the shadows of life with rosy tints. If trouble comes it glides over them without touching the springs of their peace ; there is a resilience in their temperament which makes them rebound from sorrow as a ball rebounds from the ground. "It is to be hoped," writes Mr James, "that we all have some friend, more often feminine than masculine, and young than old, whose soul is of this sky-blue tint, whose affinities are rather with flowers and birds and all enchanting innocencies, than with dark human passions ; who can think no ill

of man or God, and in whom religious gladness, being in possession from the outset, needs no deliverance from any antecedent burden." * Or, to quote Francis W. Newman, "God has two families of children on this earth, the *once-born*, and the *twice-born*."

"The former see God, not as a strict Judge, not as a glorious Potentate, but as the animating spirit of a beautiful, harmonious world; beneficent and kind, merciful as well as pure. The same characters generally have no metaphysical tendencies; they do not look back unto themselves; hence they are not distressed by their own imperfections; yet it would be absurd to call them self-righteous, for they hardly think of themselves *at all*. This childlike quality of their nature makes the opening of religion very happy to them; for they no more shrink from God than a child from an emperor, before whom the parent trembles. . . . He is to them the impersonation of kindness and beauty. . . . Of human sin they know perhaps little in their own hearts and not very much in the world, and human suffering does but melt them to tenderness. Thus, when they approach God, no inward disturbance ensues; and without being as yet spiritual, they have a certain complacency and perhaps romantic sense of excitement in their simple worship."

I think we all know instances of this happy and attractive type of religion—men and women who have never had a deep sense of the world's passion

* *Varieties of Religious Experience*, p. 80. (Gifford Lecture.)

and sin and sorrow—not of their own, but who are still instinctively and honestly religious. Among leaders in thought, Emerson and Walt Whitman are good examples; both men who took the world in its beauty, and men, together with themselves, in their actual condition, and God as the great, bright “Oversoul,” but had no insight into the darker side of things, and who acted and spoke often as though that darker side never existed. It is a very delightful type, this: we all like to meet such people, and many of us wish we were like them.

In sharp contrast with this there is the other type of religion—that which Mr James rather unfortunately calls the “religion of the sick soul,” or which F. W. Newman more happily calls the religion of the “twice-born.”

This is the faith of those who are not necessarily morbid, but who are profoundly impressed with the evil aspects of life, with the terrible ravages of sin, and with the slow progress of the world in goodness. Such men ask themselves “How can men live happy lives in a world so out of joint as this is? How can they ignore things that strike at the root of human peace and joy.” It is possible to forget ourselves in our sensations, or in the satisfactions of a pleasant environment, only by refusing to think; and to refuse to think is to play a sorry trick with our higher nature. We are here to face facts; and the facts of life cannot be

painted in rose-tints. We ourselves may be among the few fortunates of life; but if we have any heart in us, shall we close our ears to the cries of the miserable and the oppressed? Can we ignore the unspeakable suffering caused by the poison of sin and selfishness; by vice and drunkenness and crime? Is it possible for a man to watch young lives plunging madly into the vortex of pleasure, presently to be seen struggling, white-lipped and despairing, on the breakers, finally to be flung—mere human flotsam and jetsam—against the rugged rocks of destiny and retribution? When you think of the efforts put forth to better the world, and how abortive most of them are; when you remember how long Christianity has been at work, leavening the stubborn lump of humanity, and how slowly that leaven is spreading; when you consider how every wave of progress is followed by a lapse of reaction, often by a long ebb of reversal; when you think of the fact that God has proclaimed the Gospel of forgiveness and renewal, and is met age by age with the “great refusal” from all but a fraction of His wayward children—how can a sincere soul be anything but sad and sorrowful?

And it may be said quite truly, that apart from all evil and sin, the natural satisfactions of life are far from being deep or lasting. “In the healthiest and most prosperous existence, how many links of illness, danger, and disaster are always interposed? Unsuspectedly from the bottom of every fountain

of pleasure, as the old poet said, something bitter rises up, a touch of nausea, a falling dead by the delight, a whiff of melancholy, things that sound a knell; for fugitive as they may be, they bring a feeling, coming from a deeper region, and often have an appalling convincingness. . . . Of course the music can begin again—and again and again—at intervals. But with this the healthy-minded consciousness is left with an irremediable sense of precariousness. It is a bell with a crack; it draws its breath on sufferance and by accident.”* “Take the happiest man, the one most envied by the world, and in nine cases out of ten his inmost consciousness is of failure. Either his ideals in the line of his achievements are pitched far higher than the achievements themselves, or else he has secret ideals of which the world knows nothing, and in regard to which he inwardly knows himself to be wanting.”† “There is indeed one element in human destiny,” writes R. L. Stevenson, “that not blindness itself can controvert. Whatever else we are intended to do, we are not intended to succeed; failure is the fate allotted. *Our business is to fail in good spirits.*”

* James, *op. cit.*, p. 138.

† *Ibid.*, p. 157.

II.

Now the question which this verse seems to settle is this—that the second type of religion is higher and truer than the first.

The joyous, happy-go-lucky, light-hearted, people are very charming to meet, and very delightful to live with; they have a true place in the world. We could not do without these childlike optimists. But they are not the noblest type of people; and their religion, full of instinctive joy though it be, is not of much account in the movement of the world upwards and God-wards. Jesus would look upon them in love and hope, but His best helpers, His bodyguard of tried soldiers, have never been drawn from among them, nor has He a promise for them as such. His crowning benediction is given to another class of men altogether. "Blessed," said He, "are they that mourn." Blessed, in other words, are the men who are deeply touched with the sorrow and pain of life, whose ear is ever open to the cry of the fallen by the way; who have a wide and active sympathy with all who are distressed in mind, body, and estate; whose heart goes out most of all to the victims of their own or other's sin in a passionate desire to help and succour. Blessed are they whose supreme interest in life is not to

enjoy it, nor primarily to make others enjoy it; but to extract out of its stiff and stubborn ore the gold of its spiritual values. These are the salt of the earth, and over them hovers the benediction of the Saviour who is the first-born of them all; "who bore our griefs and carried our sorrows, and by whose stripes we are healed."

These, I say, are the "salt of the earth"; but let us carefully distinguish them from their counterfeit. There is a class of people who are pessimists of a different creed, and over whom no benediction can be pronounced. The discontented, the querulous, the disappointed, those who have lost all sense of the preciousness and joy of life, not because they are troubled by its evanescence and its sin, but because they have too high a sense of their own deservings, and who depreciate the good gifts of God in consequence—these people are always with us. They are the marplots of the world, whose only function seems to be to keep it from being too happy. There is no moral principle at the root of their mourning. But the true mourners are those who are "very zealous for the Lord of Hosts," and who cannot bear to see His "altars overthrown, and His prophets slain with the sword." They are the people who are discontented, not with the world as God made it, but the world as man has spoiled it, and whose discontent turns into a burning passion to transform its sorrow into gladness, and to bring the beauty of hope out of the dust and ashes of its grim despair. From among these

splendid pessimists have emerged almost all the prophets, the reformers, the enthusiasts of the world—Elijah, the two Isaiahs, Jeremiah, Amos, John the Baptist, Paul, Augustine, Savonarola, Luther, Wesley, Moody, and all the glorious company of the world's apostles. Nay, Jesus Himself, with all His joy in the beauty and order of the world, and in the reward of human love, was one of these pessimists: His religion has been called the "Sanctuary of Sorrow," and His brightest light has shone out of the bitter pain of Calvary and the pitchy midnight of the grave.

III.

But, after all, in what sense are these mourners to be called "Blessed"? At the very best, it can only be in spite of their mourning?

No; "*for* they shall be comforted." There is a true spiritual connection between their present sorrow and their future joy; it follows, as the morning rises on the midnight, by a kind, inevitable law.

To put it in a word, Christianity is, at its root, the faith of optimism, not of pessimism, *but its optimism comes by way of pessimism*. It is a faith that has the deepest joy in it that the world contains. It is not the joy that comes by ignoring the unpleasant facts of life, but by rising superior to them; not by care-

less ease, but by strenuous moral endeavour, and by hard-won spiritual victory ; not by self-indulgence, but by a divine conquest of self. Note the elements of this joy.

1. *It is safe, for its ground can never be overturned.*

The joy of the unthinking is held at the mercy of the merest accident, for a moment's honest reflection shows its shallowness. The joy of the pleasure-seeker is purchased at the price of sure reaction and disillusionment, when its source runs suddenly dry, or the capacity for it is slowly lost. The joy of the vicious is precarious, for ever at the feast sits the grim spectre of retribution ; and across the laughter and the song break discords of disappointment and sudden woe. But the joy of the Christian who has faced life's facts with open eye, and made its higher choices, and ranged himself on the side of all that is great and abiding—what can touch the spring of that ? The assurance of divine forgiveness, the realisation of the divine cleansing, the conviction of the divine friendship—is there any power that can take these away, or the happiness they bring ? This is the true blessedness, and “ your joy no man taketh from you.”

2. *Again it is a nobler joy.*

It is not won at the expense of others' shame and sorrow ; its ingredients are free from the bitterness which comes of selfishness and meanness. This element in blessedness has been finely put in the closing scene in George Eliot's *Romola*, where

Romola is teaching her little step-son Lillo the secret of true living.

"I should like," said Lillo, "to be something that would make me a great man, and very happy besides—something that would not hinder me from having a good deal of pleasure."

"That is not easy, my Lillo. It is only a poor sort of happiness that could ever come by caring very much about our own narrow pleasures. We can only have the highest happiness, such as comes along with being a great man, by having wide thoughts, and much feeling for the rest of the world as well as ourselves; and this sort of happiness often brings so much pain with it, that we can only tell it from pain by its being what we should choose before everything else, because our souls see it is good. There are so many things wrong and difficult in the world, that no man can be truly great—he can hardly keep himself from wickedness—unless he gives up thinking much about pleasure or rewards, and gets strength to endure what is hard and painful. . . . There was Fra Girolamo (Savonarola)—you know why I keep to-morrow sacred; He had the greatness that belongs to a life spent in struggling against powerful wrong, and in trying to raise men to the highest ends they were capable of. And so, my Lillo, if you mean to act nobly and seek to know the best things God has put within the reach of men, you must learn to fix your mind on that end, and not on what will happen to you because of it. And remember, if you were to

choose something lower, and make it the rule of your life to seek your own pleasure and escape what is disagreeable, calamity might come just the same ; and it would be calamity falling on a base mind, which is the one form of sorrow that has no balm in it, and that may well make a man say 'It would have been better for me if I had never been born.' " (*Romola*, Blackwood's edition, pp. 503-4)

3. *And, to crown all, this is the divine "joy."*

We speak of the "Blessed God." In what does the blessedness of God consist? Not in ease, or aloofness from the world and its sorrows, but in first sharing the burden of it, and then in transforming that burden into a stepping-stone for the accomplishment of this saving purpose. Christ's joy? It was woven of all the darkest threads that human experience contains, but as nature transforms her soot into diamonds, and her mud into opals and sapphires, and uses her earthquakes to treasure up her coal beds for future generations, so the Cross of Jesus, which was the bitterest issue of human sin and hate on the one side, becomes the very symbol of Heaven's love and triumph on the other. "Who, for the joy that was set before Him, endured the Cross" and went down into nethermost Hell, that He might purchase life everlasting for a lost world !

Blessed, then, are they that mourn and suffer and weep with Christ, truly they shall be comforted, for if they suffer with Him, they shall also reign with Him, of whose kingdom there shall be no end.

MEEK BUT MIGHTY

BY REV. E. GRIFFITH-JONES, B.A.

MEEK BUT MIGHTY

“Blessed are the meek.”—MATTHEW v. 5.

MEEKNESS may be described as a neglected virtue ; and this implies that true religion is either misunderstood, or neglected, or both. It is certain that, in the best and truest sense of the word, Christianity is the religion of meekness, and that the empire of Christianity is conterminous with the range, and power, and victory of this quality in the world. And yet how few of us understand and heartily accept this Beatitude — “Blessed are the meek” ; and how much fewer still is the number of those who believe in their hearts the promise associated with it—“for they shall inherit the earth.”

We look back at the history of mankind and we see a long procession of empires that have in turn risen and become supreme, and possessed the earth for a time. Here they are—Britain, France, Spain, ancient Rome, Assyria, Babylon, Egypt, and then behind them the dim procession of prehistoric kingdoms whose records are being

slowly upturned out of the desert sands of the East. These have come, and most of them have gone; for a time they did possess the earth—or the most important portion of it—and in time they gave way to others. But there is not one of these kingdoms and governments but which was built, not on meekness and gentleness, but ultimately on force. The strong arm, the merciless hand—these have ruled in the obvious and worldly sense; these have so far “possessed the earth.” And when out of the lovely Sermon on the Hill, the voice of Jesus sends forth this Beatitude, it sounds to most of us as a strange and curious puzzle rather than as a Gospel truth. History seems to give it the direct lie, since His coming as well as before.

And turning from nations to individuals, it is not otherwise. The world's philosophy has always assumed the Beatitude of the self-assertive, the strong-willed, the pushing, the men who ride roughshod over all opposition, who are troubled with no qualms, and never hesitate to sacrifice principle to convenience when it suits them; for these, it would appear, “shall inherit the earth.” The meek man goes to the wall, is trodden underfoot, is not wanted, except to be made a tool and a stepping-stone by stronger and more unscrupulous men. This is still the real creed of most of us, even though we may theoretically believe in this beautiful creed of Christ. In church we profess

to believe Him, but in business most people still act as though they disbelieved Him.

I.

But do they really disbelieve Him—or is it some distortion of His teaching—some misapprehension of its meaning? We shall only find that out by examining with open mind what that teaching is.

We must read this text in the light of that other text, “for I am *meek* and lowly of heart,” if we would see it in its true scope and beauty. In Christ we see the very type and norm of meekness as a ruling principle. And at once, when we realise this, our misconception begins to melt away; we begin to see light shining on a very dark place. Our usual idea of a meek man is of one who is simply mild and yielding; who gives way under all attack and opposition; who has nothing to say for himself when provoked, or tyrannised over, who, in a word, is a mushy, invertebrate, characterless creature. When, however, we face Jesus Christ, and ask what was the outstanding feature of His character, we find ourselves in the presence of one who was of a regal, dominant, kingly nature; whose eye held men, whose presence subdued, controlled, fascinated them, and called forth their reverence and their passionate love. It is true that He never

used nor commanded the exercise of force in pursuance of His purposes; never met compulsion with a stronger compulsion; never returned blow for blow. So far as His physical liberty was concerned, He let men do with Him what they would. "As a lamb He was led to the slaughter; as a sheep is dumb before her shearers, so He opened not His mouth." Yes, He was meek and lowly of heart. And yet to-day He is the true King of men, He is the Lord Christ, whose empire includes all that is holy and desirable in men's eyes. There is a meekness that is mere weakness. But the meekness of Christ was His true stepping-stone to the throne of men's hearts—to their loyalty and devotion. Because He was the meekest who ever drew mortal breath, He is to-day the mightiest among the mighty. And that was because He displayed His heavenly quality in its majesty and not its weakness.

And so if we would realise the truth of this law, we must not choose as its type some poor mean-spirited creature, who has no courage or resources, no energy or pluck, and then raise difficulties. That is what the critics of the Christian faith invariably do; they pick out someone without physical stamina, without mental gifts, without moral grit or fibre, and seeing how he is pushed from pillar to post in this rude and careless world, they scoff and say—"Is that the kind of man we are called upon to admire, and choose as our ideal and pattern?"

And we answer, No! that is not the true type of

meekness. Show us rather the man who is full of energy, and stamina, and grit, but who is self-contained ; who is capable of making his way in the world in virtue of the qualities that push, and pull, and conquer in a tussle of brain and will, but who refuses to use this power with ruthless disregard of what is high and holy ; who is full of activity, but bare of self-seeking ; who is all a *man* in his thinking, willing, acting, but “ who acts under calmness, under sweetness, under the law of benevolence and love ” ; who is too magnanimous to use his superior resources for the crushing of rivals, and the pushing of weaker men into the dust and the mud of life ; who is free from resentment, wrath, clamour, and all uncharitableness, but who acts always in humble loyalty to the holy will of God ; who, in a word, is keenly sensitive to his duties, and sublimely careless about his rights—that is the true type of meekness. And of such a man it is true, that he is in the line of the true rulers of men. For these, ultimately, are the men who win the regard, the respect, the love, the homage of the world ; these are the men who have *influence* ; these are the men who in the end are destined to come to the front. Even ungodly men admire such characters ; and even the ruthless world, after martyring them as it often in its blindness does, lays its wreath of homage upon their graves. Jesus was put to death on the Cross because He was meek ; but to-day that Cross is His throne, from which He rules the nations of the earth in righteousness and in love.

One more word of caution. We must get away from any narrow sense of the word *inherit*. Our Lord does not mean that the meek man is likely, at once and in virtue of his meekness, to become a rich man, possessing large estates, and great kingdoms. Land is not the inheritance here mentioned, nor banking shares, nor palaces, nor rich retinues of servants. "His kingdom is not of this world." His people so far have for the most part been the poor, and the down-trodden, and the despised, but they have had a rich inheritance for all that. The Christian at his lowest is a man—

"Lord of himself, though not of lands,
Who having nothing, yet hath all."

And though as followers of Jesus we never had an acre to call our own, nor a foot of soil in which to bury ourselves, yet we should still be rich, rich in contentment, in love, in control over the kingdom within, in possession of a quiet spirit, and a heart at rest ; in love, and joy, and gladness. The greedy and the grasping may possess more than they can measure or count, and still be poverty-stricken in spirit. And a man may have little or nothing of the lower good of life, and yet be rich toward God, and rich toward his fellow-men, and rich in himself. He inherits the earth in all its higher possibilities of giving pleasure and blessing, because he, like His master, is meek and lowly of heart.

II.

All this, as you all know, is true. And yet, if we are to meet our difficulties in relation to this passage, we must not stop here.

“For,” as it has often been put to me, by those who are puzzled by this Beatitude, “we are placed in a world where struggle is the primary law of success. We are a part of the actual mixed community of men and women, many of whom do not acknowledge the laws of the kingdom of God. But we have to meet them in the rivalries of life; we have to do business with them. And if so, we must meet them on that basis of struggle and rivalry which rules the business and industrial world. If we give them what they want, they will take our all, and so the meeker we are, the worse off we shall be. It is not the meek, but the greedy who will inherit the earth in that sense.” And there are many who long for direction and guidance in view of this contradiction between the actual world in which they live, and the ideal world of which they read in the Beatitudes.

In answer I would say, to begin with, that a great deal of nonsense has been believed and preached about the law of struggle in nature, and among men. It is taken for granted in effect that it is essentially a selfish thing and un-Christlike thing to engage in any kind of contest for money, position, and power.

We must get rid of that idea, if we are to penetrate deep into the meaning of the Christian life. There is a sense in which it is absolutely true that we have been sent into the world to win our place in it. Struggle is the condition of survival. This world is built on such lines that if a man makes no effort to assert himself, he will either infallibly perish, or become a dead-weight on the energies, and a burden on the kindness, of others. And apart from mere survival, the law of struggle is good for us. We should never realise and bring to perfection what is in us, we should not grow, our possibilities would never be awakened and turned to use, were it not for this perpetual contest of man against circumstance, and of man with his fellow-men, which is one of the primary conditions of our earthly life.

The question of meekness comes in, not in the fact of struggle, but in the spirit of it. There are three ways in which the struggle for a living, or for place and influence, may be carried on. There is the brutal form, in which rivals push each other aside, if they can, irrespective of everything but success. "If a man stands in my path"—that is the way men talk on this lowest level—"I just shove him aside." I call this the brutal form, because it goes on the principle of brute force. It is simply a question of strength. No higher considerations are permitted to enter into the contest. This is the way of the "big business man" often; this is the way most millionaires make their money. They have the power to

crush their rivals, and they do it without mercy or ruth.

Over against this comes the highest form of struggle, in which force has no place, except the force of righteousness, of fair dealing, of the quality of a man's service. "I will succeed in life if I can," such a man will say, "but if I do, it will be because I deserve to do so. I will trust the laws of right, provide things honest in the sight of all men, rely not on my power to undersell or to outbid my rival, but on the real value of what I do, or sell, or procure. If I have rivals, I will give them fair play—live and let live is the principle of my work—and if I can help a neighbour, even though he be my rival, I will do so. This may not bring me immediate success, wealth may never come in my way, but I will trust in God and in my fellows, and abide by my faith that if I do my duty humbly, faithfully, and well, a due place will be found for me even in this world of unprincipled and crushing conflict." Now this is the meek man, who relies not on the power of force, of the almighty dollar, but on the higher laws of the universe, in virtue of which worth is at last recognised and vindicated against all comers. And this is the direction in which the world is slowly but inevitably moving. It is a world built fundamentally on moral principles, which in the end will "bring forth judgment unto victory."

But there is a third way in which the struggle of life may be conducted—a kind of illogical mixture

of the other two. As the world is constituted at present, we see the principles I have just mentioned struggling for their place along with the lower principles of force, and greed, and unscrupulousness—like tender flowers fighting for their foothold among weeds. And most men who are not given over to hopeless wrong-doing, strive in an inconsistent way to follow these higher laws. They disapprove of immoral ways in business, of the crushing of the weak by the strong, of the gaining of advantage by riding rough-shod over the laws of right. But often they do the same as others. Their faith is weak ; they would like always to be straight, and true, and unselfish, but they dare not throw themselves in whole-hearted trust on their principles, and so they fall again and again in weak-kneed compliance with the ways of the world. And it is these who give currency to the wicked doctrine that the laws of the kingdom of God are counsels of perfection, and cannot be really followed in the practical affairs of life. There is no sceptic so dangerous as he who half doubts his beliefs, and who half believes his doubts. It is clear that we must judge of the supremacy and the practicability of these laws, not by the many who profess them, and do not practise them, but by the few who venture their all upon them, and loyally accept the temporary failure to which they must often lead in a world so full of intercrossing forces and warring principles as this. And though loyalty to the highest has led thousands to the stake as martyrs,

and thousands of others to the martyrdom of business losses and ruin; it is by the faithful witness of these noble men that the principles for which they suffer slowly but surely win their way, and march to victory.

III.

For, it is as certain as anything can be, that the world is coming round to Jesus Christ, and that in the end, "the meek shall inherit the earth."

Civilisation itself, as we shall see more at large in a later discourse, is to a large extent the embodiment of the principle of non-resistance to force, and of the supremacy of right by that means. In primitive forms of society every man goes armed, and in treating every man as a possible enemy he invites everybody to attack him. In civilised countries, on the other hand, men go about totally unarmed, each treating others as actual friends, and so inviting their trust and confidence. In the Middle Ages, a man who was insulted was bound to challenge and fight the offender, and duels were frequent, as is still the case among certain continental nations with their antiquated code of honour. In this country we have gone a step beyond that, and act on the principle that the best way to treat an insult to oneself is to ignore it; and so we hardly ever hear one man insult another. In these and a hundred other ways we practically

conform to the teaching of this verse, and we find that it pays, that it succeeds. In matters of personal relations the meek man has conquered ; he has vindicated the truth of this Beatitude.

And the time will come when the same will be true of the world of business. We are just now on the crest of a wave of reaction. It is the era of the strong as against the weak, rather than of the righteous against the unprincipled. The moneyed man, the financier, the manipulator of stocks and shares in the world's markets is on top, and the rest are beneath. But it is not going to last ; it is but a stage in progress, and in time it will work itself out. The age of crushing competition will be succeeded by something better by-and-by. In time it will again be seen that in matters commercial, as in matters personal, the reign of force must give way to the reign of meekness—*i.e.*, not the reign of incompetency and weakness, but of the spiritual laws by which men's place in life will be settled by the quality of their service, and not the mere force of their selfishness.

Finally, there are signs of the same happy issue in the world of international politics. The colossal armaments of Europe are over-reaching themselves. They are the last gasp of the brutal principle of the rule and law of the strong, the final throes of barbarism in its death-gasp. Soon they will topple over, possibly in some vast cataclysm of universal war ; but more probably—let us pray for this devoutly !—in a general agreement to set aside the foolish pretence

that the welfare of nations is dependent on armaments and warlike stores (nobody really believes in that), and an acknowledgment that they can survive only in virtue of their numbers, their industries, their power of service, and the nobility of their manhood.

Meanwhile I plead for a more wholehearted faith in this great principle of meekness among Christian people. We must be prepared to practise it ourselves if we would prove its value to the world. In our personal lives there is practically an unlimited scope for its exercise ; the time has already come when in the family, in our circle of friendships, and in our church-relationships, we can put it to the test ; and if we do so with complete trust, we shall never find the promise it contains to fail. It is so to a large measure in the wider life of business. And though in international matters it looks as though it were as yet a dream of the distant future, we can at least throw all our political influence as citizens on the side of a policy of conciliation and kindness and peace. If in hours of national excitement and panic the Church were to do this with undivided mind, many a crisis would be solved, and many a cruel war be averted, and the kingdom of God on earth would be much nearer than it sometimes appears to be.

HUNGRY BUT FULL

By REV. E. GRIFFITH-JONES, B.A.

HUNGRY BUT FULL

"Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled."—MATTHEW v. 6.

THIS is the benediction of holy desire. It is the seal of the Master on the legitimate cravings of the soul. It is the divine guarantee that man lives not by satiety, but by aspiration, not in virtue of what he possesses, but of what he aims at. There is an ignoble hunger, and a sordid thirst; there is a hunger and a thirst that are heavenly and ennobling, and this Beatitude assures us that those who feel them in their fulness of desire, shall not fail of adequate and eternal satisfaction. It is a moving thought, that God has abundant provision for our highest wants, and that His honour is pledged in their fulfilment.

I.

There is a philosophy which tells us that true life consists in self-repression. "Lessen your wants," said the Stoic, "if you would attain peace." This thought is put into a quaint equation in Carlyle's

Sartor Resartus :—"So true is it what I then said," writes Teufelsdröckh, "that the fraction of life can be increased in value not so much by increasing your numerator, as by lessening your denominator. Nay, unless my algebra deceive me, unity itself if divided by zero will give infinity. Make thy claim of wages a zero then : thou hast the world at thy feet."

That is one way of solving the problem. But it has this fault—that it is a counsel not of perfection, but of despair. It is the maxim of the man who has found that in this world need and satisfaction seldom meet, and is disappointed in consequence.

On the other hand, it may truly be said, that the upward march of life is the direct result of developing new wants. For what we want we strive after ; and effort is the secret of enlargement. The lower animals have few wants, and when these are satisfied they have no further demands made on their energies, and so they sink into quiescence. It is a biological law that no creature can evolve beyond the line of its felt needs. Our greatness as a race is due to the multitude of our needs, the manifold forms of hunger and thirst that afflict us, which set us in the line of effort, and so of growth. This is true of society as well as the individual. The fewer the wants of a race or community, the slower its progress, the lower its culture. The history of civilisation is the history of the evolution of new wants. Industry and art ; social, political, and religious institutions are all the fruit of this multiplication of our channels of desire. The

higher and the richer our wants, the fuller our life will ultimately become, and the more rapid our advancement in the scale of being.

The mistake of the Stoic theory was to repress instead of regulating desire. What we have to do is not to have fewer needs, but to grade them in their true order. We must put first things first. "Seek ye *first* the kingdom of God and His righteousness : and all these things shall be added to you." That is to say, do not kill your desires by starving them, but put them in their proper place. Give the lower desires a low place ; do not spend your soul's strength in endeavouring to satisfy them, but reserve that for its proper and legitimate object of desire ; then, these lower desires will fall into line, and their satisfaction will come in due course. The body needs food : the mind needs knowledge, the heart longs for beauty and love : the soul hungers and thirsts for goodness. Seek each in its legitimate way and with rightful intensity, and life will in the end be ordered, and full, and blessed. That is the teaching of the Sermon on the Mount.

II.

What is this "righteousness" that we are told to hunger and thirst after ?

The word is essentially a Biblical word, and in the Old Testament we find that it has a long and rich

history. In the earlier writings it means, in the first place, right personal conduct as between man and man : then, legal standing, as being blameless before an ideal standard of judgment. In the prophets it takes a wider and deeper social meaning, flowing from the moral character of God, who demands that the relations of His people should be based on an inherent principle of justice as between governors and governed, rich and poor, great and lowly. By slow degrees the religious meaning of the word begins to emerge, as the holy and righteous character of God is more and more clearly realised. An ideal nation is conceived, one that lives in the fear of the Lord, and aims at the perfect fulfilment of His holy will ; and an ideal individual, whose religion consists in the attainment of right relations with his Maker (trust and obedience), and with his fellow-men (justice and mercy). As we enter the circle of New Testament teaching, we find that the idea of righteousness becomes unspeakably enriched in proportion to the more perfect revelation of the Nature of God as the Heavenly Father of men. To be righteous is to be forgiven, to be cleansed from the guilt and power and love of sin, and to attain to God-likeness. To be righteous according to the mind of Christ is to be reconciled to God as dear children, and to become perfect in goodness and love, even as He is perfect. To be righteous according to the teaching of the Apostles, is to live the life of the spirit in entire dependence on the friendship and grace of Christ.

His righteousness is to become ours. It is after this ideal that we should strive with all our yearning ; this is the righteousness after which we are to hunger and to thirst.

III.

Such is the end before us ; let us consider the mood in which we should strive after it.

The character of the desire with which we should follow after righteousness is described as *hunger and thirst*.

These are elemental appetites, and are marked by *intensity*, by a reach after something *outside us for their satisfaction*, and by a sense that *life itself depends on their satisfaction*.

There are no desires more *intense* than genuine hunger and thirst. The mild and evanescent forms in which they come to us in this ordered community are but a shadow of the real thing. Only in times of war and famine can their strength be gauged, or in cases of such extreme poverty as seldom occur within the experience of civilised nations. The means of assuaging our bodily wants are so near and constant that few of us have ever realised the master-passion of desire which sweeps over a man who is really without food or drink or the prospect of either—the passion which resolves life into an unspeakable pain, and makes the transgressions of the laws of property a trifle

even to the most honest and upright. Now this is the appetite which is used to represent our right attitude towards righteousness. As a starving man yearns for food and water, so should our souls yearn after the perfect life. It is to be our master-passion, swallowing up all the minor desires and yearnings of life as extreme hunger swallows up every other want of the body. "As the hart panteth after the water-brooks so panteth my soul after Thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God; when shall I come and appear before God?" "O God, Thou art my God; early will I seek Thee, my soul thirsteth for Thee, my flesh longeth for Thee in a dry and thirsty land where no water is; to see Thy power and Thy glory, so as I have seen Thee in the sanctuary. . . . My soul followeth hard after Thee." "My soul longeth, yea, fainteth for the courts of the Lord; my heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God." Here are a few typical cries of the soul after righteousness.

Can we bring our own spiritual aspirations into the presence of these passionate cries without a sense of humiliation? Do we indeed long for God and His righteousness like that? Is our eye so single, and our heart so full of desire, and our soul so filled with a passion for goodness? If not, then we can have no part in the blessedness promised here. For it is in proportion to the depth of genuineness of our desire alone, that the answer can come.

Then, both hunger and thirst are *outreaching*

instincts ; they look for their satisfaction, not from the repression, nor from the discipline of our desires, but from the environment. Hunger within, food without—that is the law. No man can satisfy his own hunger or thirst ; he must go forth and seek the bread and the water for which he craves.

Nor can we satisfy the soul by looking within ourselves. Self-contemplation, self-discipline, self-conquest, self-culture—there is no ultimate peace for our higher cravings that way. Tell a man who has come to you for comfort because he has failed to maintain his place in business, and has squandered the whole of his capital, and is hopelessly in debt, tell him to “draw on his reserves,” and what can he say? That is a man’s actual position before God and his own conscience. He has no reserves to fall back upon ; he is hungry, thirsty, and helpless to replenish his exhausted soul from anything that is in him ; “of himself he can do nothing.” But even apart from the bankrupt condition of humanity, it would not be otherwise. All life is dependent on the environment for its sustenance. We depend on Nature for our physical sustenance—we can provide nothing but the appetite, it is she who gives our food in due season. And in our highest life we can provide only the appetite ; God alone has the bread and the water of life. What He asks of us is that we should cease spending our money on that which is not bread, and our labour on that which satisfieth not ; and that we should hearken diligently unto Him, and eat that

which is good, and delight ourselves in fatness, for with Him is the fountain of life.

Yes, *and life itself depends* on its appropriate nourishment. If we eat not, we shall die. The man who has permanently lost his appetite for food and cannot eat, must die. Therefore, a healthy desire for food and drink is one of the conditions of well-being. So the mind that has lost its desire for knowledge, atrophies; the heart that turns with loathing from all offered love, starves; the soul that rejects God, and the provision of truth and love that He offers it, must die the second death. Brethren, if we could but realise how imperative is the need of constant spiritual replenishment, how we cannot live without frequent meditation on the high things of God, and constant prayerfulness, and faithful companionship with the Saviour, we should not allow ourselves to be put off by lower sources of satisfaction—"broken cisterns that hold no water"—and would wait patiently on the Lord that all our wants might be supplied, and strength be given to us "according to our day."

IV.

Now let us turn to the happy promise of our text—the Beatitude that follows this eager appetite for divine things—"for they shall be filled."

I have more than once in these sermons pointed out the fine sunny optimism that pervades this

"manifesto of the kingdom." The Beatitudes are in a sense the tables of the Christian law, and present us with an ideal so lofty that no man can hope ever to attain to it fully. But while the Law of the Ten Commandments was fringed with lightnings, and tremulous with suppressed thunders of judgment, the Law of Christ is lit up with a summer radiance of hope, and is vocal with the music of perpetual promise. "Blessed is the man . . ."—then comes what seems like an impossible virtue—"for . . ."; then follows the assurance of happy attainment. Failure is not provided for in the kingdom of heaven. He who lays down the law ensures the condition of its fulfilment.

"So nigh is grandeur to our dust,
So near to God is man ;
When duty whispers, ' Lo ! thou must,'
The youth replies ' I can ! ' "

So writes the sunny Concord prophet, singing in his own bright and confident note. But that note is a borrowed one. No one could sing it, save on the basis of Christian hope that what God demands even in the Beatitudes, He provides the means of fulfilment through His redeeming grace.

There is no guarantee of satisfaction for the lower wants of our nature. Men strive incessantly after all sorts of things ; the world is a hive of strenuous endeavour after wealth, honour, knowledge, pleasure, love, power ; there is no remission in the perpetual struggle that goes on. But how few gain the object

of their desire ! The few win, the many lose ; and for one who can honestly say that life has given him all he has ever seriously striven for, there are thousands who fall by the way ; or who, having found their desire, realise that possession is a disappointment, and that the struggle was more rewarding than the realisation—the hunger than the meal.

But in the highest region of our nature—here is the promise—to desire earnestly is to have, to hunger and thirst is to be filled. This true wealth is within the reach of all. Yearn but for the best things, and you shall have them ; it is only the poor and disappointing things that are uncertain. “ Ask, and it shall be given you ; seek, and ye shall find ; knock, and it shall be opened to you. For every one that asketh receiveth ; and he that seeketh findeth ; and to every one that knocketh, it shall be opened. This is a thought that brings me perpetual comfort and joy. There are so many things that are uncertain, disappointing, evanescent, hard to obtain, and mere dust and ashes to enjoy—that it is with infinite thankfulness we are able to turn to the great things of God, and to realise that the kingdom of heaven is a republic in which all have equal rights and equal privileges, if only they hunger and thirst for its blessings. Here is the only true principle of equality—*equality of opportunity with results in proportion to our capacity for seizing and using that opportunity.* Thank God that there is one great area of experience

where a man cannot say, "I have done all a man can do, and have utterly or partially failed to win the promise." If we fail here, it is not for lack of scope ; it is not for lack of resources placed at our disposal ; it is not because the treasury is empty or the fountain run dry, but because our desire fails, or is weak and unworthy of the great thing offered to us, without money and without price !

V.

And so we return to this point—how far do we fulfil the condition of this righteousness—this life of reconciliation, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost ?

What place does religion hold in your life, dear brother and sister ? Is it one of the side issues of your desire, or does it run in the main channel ? Do you seek it as a subsidiary source of happiness and strength, or is it the master-passion ? These are the questions that settle the comfort you will get from it, the power it will have over you, the standard of attainment it will enable you to attain. Exactly in the measure in which you hunger and thirst after it, will it satisfy you. The appetite determines the feast. The table is laden with bounties ; the welcome is unstinted and hearty ; "according to your faith so shall it be unto you." The promise is contingent

only on our bringing to it a heart open in all its avenues of approach to the inflowing grace and mercy of God. If we give ourselves to God, He will be able, and only so, to give Himself, and all the blessings of His kingdom to us "good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over," . . . "for with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again."

"With what measure each gives himself to the Saviour, the Saviour gives Himself in His salvation back to each. Only when at last there comes a man with his self all open, with door behind door, back into the most secret chambers, all unclosed, ready to give himself entirely, wanting everything, ready to take everything that Jesus has to give, wanting and ready to take the whole of Jesus into the whole of himself, only then are the last gates withdrawn, and as when the ocean gathers itself up and enters with its tide the open mouth of the river, like a conqueror riding into a surrendered town, so does the Lord in all His richness, with His perfect standards, His mighty motives, His infinite hopes, give Himself to the soul which has been utterly given to Him." *

* Phillips Brooks, *Sermons preached in English Churches*, p. 285.

MERCIFUL, THEREFORE FORGIVEN

BY REV. E. GRIFFITH-JONES, B.A.

MERCIFUL, THEREFORE FOR- GIVEN

“Blessed are the merciful ; for they shall obtain mercy.”—
MATTHEW v. 7.

I REMEMBER once hearing a great organist rendering an improvisation on the Vesper Hymn, at the Albert Hall. First the strong tender chords of the tune were given with quiet emphasis. Then it was repeated with simple variations, which gradually became more and more complex and interwoven, till the swelling chorus flowed, and rippled, and grew into a mighty cataract of sound, echoing in great waves of harmony through the immense building. Yet underneath all this the original air was still perceptible. Then the storm gradually stilled, and slowly the theme disentangled itself from the mass and tumult of sound, till at the close there was nothing left but the same simple strain with which the rendering began.

These Beatitudes may be likened to that improvisation. It has been well said that they are not

isolated melodies or detached chords, but steadily enriching variations of a central theme. Each of them enshrines some aspect of the Love of God in the soul of man. "The first is Love in her humility, with such great thoughts of the possibilities within her reach that she counts not herself to have attained. The second is Love in tears, bewailing the lovelessness of the world. The third is Love suffering wrong in the hope of vanquishing it. The fourth is Love impelled by insatiable desire for fuller satisfaction. The fifth is Love retaliating on wrong. The sixth is Love burning with a faith so pure that evil cannot withstand. The seventh is Love so equable that it can quiet and steady anger and strife. The eighth is Love misunderstood and persecuted"—yet triumphant.*

We now take up the fifth strain in this swelling chorus, the echo and antiphon of which we hear in the immortal 13th chapter of the First Epistle to the Corinthians. "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy."

I.

What is Mercifulness ?

It is the outgoings of love in kindly retaliation, in gracious revenge, on evil, with a view to "slaying the

* F. B. Meyer, "*Blessed are Ye*," pp. 77-8.

enmity" that brought it forth, and turning the Marah of its bitterness into sweetness. Meekness is love suffering with patience, passive resistance under wrong ; mercifulness is suffering love actively exercised in redeeming the wrong-doer.

I would picture Meekness as a sweet maiden, with folded hands, waiting for the tumult and passion of war around her to die down, knowing that the day of her triumph is surely coming ; but Mercifulness I would depict as a strong but tender woman, moving among the wounded enemy who are in her power, that she may rescue them, bind up their wounds, and turn them into loyal friends by the irresistible charm of her grace.

Mercy is the richest fruit of the divine love. The Bible is full of it from first page to last. It is ankle deep, as it were, in Genesis, knee deep in the Prophets, shoulder deep in the Psalms, fathomless as midmost ocean in the New Testament. Our Lord Himself was the incarnate mercy of God come visibly to earth, His ministry was pre-eminently a ministry of mercy, His miracles are chiefly significant because they reveal so many aspects of this rich and many-sided attribute of God, and His great sacrifice on the Cross marks the ultimate reach and triumph of mercy in its mightiest manifestation.

Man's creation in the divine image is in nothing else so well illustrated and proved as in that he can repeat and imitate this quality of the Divine Nature. It is impossible here not to repeat the oft-quoted lines

of Portia, in Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice*, where this thought finds its classic expression :—

“The quality of mercy is not strained,
It droppeth as the gentle dew from heaven
Upon the place beneath ; it is twice blessed :
It blesseth him that gives and him that takes.
'Tis mightiest in the mightiest ; it becomes
The thronèd monarch better than his crown.
His sceptre shows the force of temporal power,
The attribute to awe and majesty,
Wherein doth sit the dread and fear of kings :
But mercy is above this sceptred sway ;
It is enthronèd in the hearts of kings,
It is an attribute of God Himself,
And earthly power doth then show likest God's
When mercy seasons justice.”

Therefore, as God-likeness is the final end of character, and we are to strive to be perfect as our Father in heaven is perfect, and this attribute of mercy is His highest attribute, it was meet and fitting that mercy should find an honoured place among the Beatitudes. “Blessed are the merciful ; for they shall obtain mercy.”

But it will repay us to look more closely at this beautiful quality, which is *primus inter pares*—chiefest among many of like nobility. Mercy is the daughter of Love, and has three sisters—Grace, Pity, Forgiveness—yet is she greater than them all.

Grace is love undeserved going out to those who have forfeited all claim to her benefits. Pity is the throb of Love's heart in contemplating the sorrows and woes caused by sin. Forgiveness is Love annulling her

claim of vengeance against those who have outraged her kindness and forbearance. Mercy includes all these, but goes further and lasts longer, for she is Love, gracious, pitiful, and forgiving, actively endeavouring to alleviate and rescue the sinner from his sin, by freely extending her friendship and succour to him. The Gospel is the channel of God's redeeming mercy flowing out in a cleansing life-giving stream to the lost and sinful world. Such is mercy in her essential nature.

Well, this is one of the qualities that we are called upon to show in our dealings with one another, and with the great world outside. We are to be merciful to each other as God is merciful to us all.

II.

The Opportunities of Mercy.

It is one thing, however, to advocate a great virtue as a general principle, it is another to display it consistently in the practical affairs of life. The Beatitudes as ideal ends command the flippant assent of every one who has a reputation for judgment and good sense; but the Beatitudes as rules for everyday life? They are surely more often honoured in the breach than in the observance. Let me, therefore, point out a few of the ways in which we should be doers of the Word as well as hearers of it.

1. *One of the channels of mercifulness between man and man is the exercise of a charitable judgment as regards others.*

The Sermon on the Mount is full of illustrations and sidelights on the Beatitudes. One that throws up this quality of mercy is found in the opening verses of the seventh chapter of this Gospel: "Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged; and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured unto you." Mercy must, in other words, begin with our thoughts concerning others. No fountain can send forth sweet and bitter waters, and if our thought has a bitter root in them, they will surely bear bitter fruit in our words and deeds. When men feel and think unkindly towards each other, they cannot speak or act otherwise in the end; for "thoughts winged with feelings are the springs of action"; "as a man thinketh in his heart, so" in the end speaks he, does he, "is he."

By judging mercifully of one another, I mean that we should take kindly views of doubtful actions, and that we should make all allowance for circumstances, temperament, temptations, and provocations. There are innumerable cases of moral judgment in which two alternative interpretations present themselves to us. We may think and speak harshly of others, and take for granted that the worst is true; and we may think with merciful intent, throwing the balance of our feelings on the side of charity and love. How much bitterness, malice, and spleen would be eradi-

cated out of life if we all forbore from thinking evil, and ever strove to think good of each other! We have so little right to judge each other at best, there is so much wrong in our own hearts and lives, that to be harsh in judging others is a great sin. "And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye? . . . Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye, then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye"—and when a man can see as clearly as that, he will cast out that "mote" as tenderly as a mother from the eye of her child.

2. *This quality of mercy has often a fine scope for action in our practical relations as well as our judgment.*

The lives of men are not often at each other's mercy in civilised countries, and if they were, all but murderers in intention or deed would inevitably spare the life of a sworn enemy. So far the gospel of forbearance has interwoven itself into the fabric of society. But there are cases when a man's interests, his reputation, his future fate, are in the keeping of some one else, and by a word, or even the withholding of a word, he may be ruined or hampered for life. Very often what determines whether that word shall or shall not be said is the recollection of some debt of kindness or unkindness. In these subtle ways, unknown to any but to each other, men may still show the cloven foot, and indulge in the elemental passion of revenge within civilised limits; or they

may display a heroism of self-restraint and magnanimity that are God-like.

And when open rupture takes place between friends and comrades, when outward relations are broken, and feelings run riot, and the natural man tugs at his chain—what then? The closer the friendship has been, the greater the scope for giving and taking pain; and though the channel for revenge may be narrowed, it may make up in intensity what it lacks in coarseness. There may be more venom in a look than in a poisoned arrow; and hearts may break at the turning away of a loved face in scorn or hatred, as surely as at a sword-thrust. “If thou hast ought against thy brother, forgive him, until seventy times seven. . . . If therefore thou art offering thy gift at the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee, leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.” We who owe everything to the mercy and forgiving love of God must not deal hardly with one another, lest in failing to show mercy to each other, we may forfeit the grace and loving-kindness of our Heavenly Father.

3. *As to the wider social aspects of this grace, I need not say much here.*

During the last century a sweeping change has passed over legislation and the administration of justice. Thanks to the influence of such reformers as John Howard and Elizabeth Fry, and the writings

of men like Charles Dickens and Charles Reade, a finer and sweeter spirit has passed over our prison and reformatory and poor-law system. There is some consideration shown now to the criminal as well as to his victim ; the function of punishment is recognised to be remedial and not revengeful, and the restoration of the guilty, as much as the protection of the innocent, is gradually being recognised as the end and aim of legislation. If you will read such books as *It is Never too Late to Mend*, you will see how very great a change has been wrought from the old system of prison life, with its horrible solitudes, its torturing punishments, its monotony and its misery, to the present vigorous but merciful system of remedial discipline, you will thank God that the Gospel spirit has at last invaded even the dark and dismal circles in which human vice and crime are being dealt with, and that man's inhumanity to man is changing into something like a reflection of the divine forbearance and the renewing kindness of His mercy.

III.

A word on the promise linked with this Beatitude—"for they shall obtain mercy."

There is a natural law of retaliation in us which helps to fulfil this Beatitude. Kindness breeds

kindness as surely as cruelty breeds cruelty and revenge. "With what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again." We disarm hatred by love, and blunt the weapon of malice by showing a front of serene and unconquerable kindness. There are few men and women who are not brought within the reach of the gentler virtues by insisting on friendly relations. It may take some time to work out this result ; but perseverance wins in the end. The only logical alternative to the old vendetta spirit which turns revenge into a religion, is the spirit of the Master's precept : "Ye have heard that it was said, an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth : but I say unto you, resist not him that is evil ; but whosoever smiteth thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also." When nations catch a glimpse of this law in their relations with one another, as men have done so generally in private life, the golden age will have begun to dawn on the darkness of the world, and wars will cease for evermore.

But there is more than a law of human retaliation in the blessing that follows the merciful. Jesus has made it clearer than any other principle of conduct, that according to our treatment of one another will be the divine action towards us. "Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us." "For if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Heavenly Father forgive your trespasses." And there is one beautiful but terrible parable in which this teaching is carried to its ultimate

issue, that we even forfeit God's forgiveness when it has been already given, if an unmerciful spirit is shown by us afterwards to anyone in our power.*

But if this spirit of mercy and forgiveness is shown by us in all our human relations and dealings, how gladly and freely does the Heavenly Father of us all extend to us His all-effacing mercy! And this, not from any arbitrary law, not because He simply wills it, but because only the forgiving can really be forgiven, for only the forgiving can benefit by forgiveness. If our hearts are filled with hatred and all uncharitableness, there is no place in them for love; and even if the hatred and the uncharitableness only lurk like cobwebs in forgotten and secret places in us, the Holy Spirit of love cannot take possession of us as His temple. Let this thought fill us with dread of failure in the manifestation of this heavenly grace, and make us eager to become pure, even as He is pure. I wonder how many of those who say they have no blessed sense of forgiveness in their hearts, fail because they themselves fail in the condition that is so imperatively laid down! We cannot believe even in God's mercy, if we fail to show mercy to others who have sinned against us.

There is a wonderful picture by a great modern artist that I once saw in a collection of his works, embodying a mediæval legend. Two knights have been engaged in mortal combat. One of them at last

* See Matthew xviii. 21-35.

has succeeded in getting his deadly enemy at his mercy ; but after a fierce inward struggle, he gives in to his pleadings for mercy and life, and lets him go free. In the picture you see the smitten knight in the distance, riding off with bent head, overcome by the magnanimity of his mortal foe. By the wayside, there is a wooden crucifix, and the conquering warrior has dismounted, and in a gush of pent-up emotion, bows in prayer before this shrine of pity. And then a miracle happens—and of all the mediæval legends this is one of the most beautiful. The crucified figure becomes instinct with life ; and instead of the wooden effigy, it is the Saviour Himself that hangs there. And slowly the pierced arms unloose themselves from the nails, the head bends low in gracious benediction, and His hands are laid in blessing on the head of the recumbent knight. He knows it not, for his eyes are bent towards the sacred blood-stained feet, but you can see that his face is filled with a glow of divine comfort and friendship. He has fulfilled what was behind of the sufferings of Christ, and has entered into the sacred fellowship of the divine forgiveness.

We may not be called upon to repeat the conditions of forgiving mercy in quite so dramatic a form as that. But with all of us, occasions arise of offence and forgiveness ; and in our own quiet way, we may be called on to exercise the divine, twice-blessed quality of mercy. Whenever we rise to the call, and show the spirit of magnanimity, we shall, like that knight of

old, find a new meaning in the Cross of Christ, and receive a sense of fellowship with Him who, "high on the rood," worked out the salvation of men, and purchased heaven for a world that had forfeited all right to the mercy of God.

PURITY, AND THE BEATIFIC
VISION

BY REV. E. GRIFFITH-JONES, B.A.

PURITY, AND THE BEATIFIC VISION

"Blessed are the pure in heart : for they shall see God."—
MATTHEW v. 8.

I.

"Blessed are the Pure."

THERE is something about this Beatitude which would appeal to the religious sentiment of antiquity with a force which we to-day can scarcely understand.

It is not improbable that all the higher meanings of the word were developed out of that far-spread idea of ceremonial purity which we find so inextricably interwoven with all the religious customs of the East. Long before the terms "clean and unclean," "pure and impure," had any ethical meaning, they were saturated with the connotation of ceremonial sanctity. To keep one's person from pollution through contact with an unclean thing or person, and

when polluted, to recover one's "cleanness" by faithfully observing certain prescribed rites was the aim of every religious person. These rites were sometimes painfully elaborate, and involved the penalty of a vexatious social retirement; yet were they enforced and obeyed with a rigour that now commands our astonishment. The origin of the distinction between things clean and unclean lies back in remotest antiquity. Before recorded history begins, we find clear traces of it. The Hebrews simply elaborated, and gradually "ethicised," through their Levitical system of things clean and unclean, a code of regulations handed down from immemorial times, and which existed in varying form and measure among all the Semitic and Indian peoples. We shall miss the key to the historical development of religion if we fail to realise the importance, and the limitations, of this distinction.

1. *On the one side, we recognise that though to our eyes the distinction between things clean and unclean is irrelevant to the contrast between right and wrong,—*

Yet it fulfilled an important function in preparing the human mind for this higher distinction. Specially do we recognise that to be "unclean" debarred a man, even in heathen religions, from all approach to the divinity whom he worshipped, and from the company of his fellow-men. The impure or unclean person was excluded for the time from the fellowship of God and man, and this under the severest penalties. Now as the essential holiness of God was pro-

gressively revealed, we can see how the notion of "clean and unclean" things would gradually take on a higher meaning, and become related to the idea of holiness. This development of thought first meets us with adequate force in the teachings of the Hebrew prophets. These seers turned the mind of Israel for the first time away from the mere conventional distinctions of ceremonial purity to the lofty region where good and bad actions are contrasted, and a pure mind is distinguished from an impure mind. They taught that to be particular about feasts and fasts, washings and purifications, while the heart harboured evil thoughts and the hands wrought unrighteousness, was to offer God, the All Holy, the All Just, a mockery of real worship. Thus was the law a schoolmaster to bring men to Christ; and into the souls of men drilled through centuries to observe a formal difference between things, there poured at last the pure teachings of One who taught that all this was but a shadow of better things to come.

2. *On the other hand, we recognise a danger as well as a benefit in this sharp distinction between clean and unclean.*

It tended, that is, to survive its true use and benefit, and to make men who had no root of spiritual religion in them, but who were punctilious in observing the rites of ceremonial purity feel "good," though their hearts were filled with unloveliness and deceit. Hence we find that side by side with a true development of religious sensitiveness

in the Hebrew nation there was another tendency, towards formalism and hypocrisy. So it came about that, confronting Jesus in His public ministry, two classes of people were prominent. On the one side, there were the truly devout, whose hearts had been fed on the teachings of the prophets, and the spiritual outpourings of the psalms, and who received His word gladly. Then over against them, there were the classes who still confounded ceremony with religion, and thought themselves holy, though they were utterly corrupt at heart, merely because they were infinitely careful not to pollute themselves through contact with things and persons who were technically "unclean."

II.

It is in view of such a religious situation that we are in the best position to understand this Beatitude.

"Blessed are the pure—in heart." This word was at once the crown and pinnacle of all the religious education of the past, and a spear-head of conviction, striking at the root of the canker that had arrested and devitalised true religion among the ancient people of God.

1. *It meant, in the first place, the complete and final abrogation of the unreal and now mischievous identification of spiritual purity with ceremonial cleanness.*

It is only when we search the Gospels carefully in view of this principle that we recognise the timeliness, we may say the inevitableness, of its enforcement there. It explains our Lord's stern attitude towards the Pharisees when we remember that in them He recognised a type of "arrested spiritual development," and therefore a stubborn barrier to the advance of His Gospel. They were yet "in their sins," because they clung to a shallow, formal, discarded notion that a man's standing before God could be vitally affected by questions of food and drink, custom and conventionality. And as He found them so entrenched in their unprogressive notions of religion that they were totally inaccessible to His truth, He turned away at last, and in indignation poured upon them the awful exposures and denunciations collected together in the 23rd chapter of Matthew. "Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, for ye pay tithe of mint, and anise, and cummin, and have left undone the weightier matters of the law, judgment, and mercy, and faith." . . . "Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which outwardly appear beautiful, but inwardly are full of dead men's bones and of all uncleanness. Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but inwardly ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity."

2. *We note also in the Gospels certain significant and pregnant passages which enforce the law of inner purity as against the conventional notions of the times.*

At one step Jesus Christ alters the centre of gravity of religious purity by moving it from the outward region of overt action, into the inner region of thought and motive.

In this Sermon on the Mount, He says, "Ye have heard that it was said, Thou shalt not commit adultery ; but I say unto you, that every one that looketh at a woman to lust after her, hath committed adultery with her already in his heart." "Ye have heard that it was said to them of old time, Thou shalt not kill ; and whosoever shall kill, shall be in danger of the judgment. But I say unto you, that every one who is angry with his brother without a cause, shall be in danger of the judgment." Elsewhere we come on many passages equally searching and final. "Now as He spake, a Pharisee asketh Him to dine with him ; and He went in and sat down to meat. And when the Pharisee saw it, he marvelled that He had not first washed before dinner. And the Lord said unto him, Now do ye Pharisees cleanse the outside of the cup and of the platter ; but your inward part is full of extortion and wickedness. Ye foolish ones, did not He that made the outside make the inside also ? Howbeit, give for alms those things that are within ; and behold, all things are clean unto you." "And He called to Him the multitude, and said unto them, Hear, and understand. Not that which entereth into the mouth defileth the man, but that which proceedeth out of the mouth, that defileth the man. . . . And Peter answered and said unto Him, declare unto us

the parable. And He said, Are ye also without understanding? Perceive ye not, that whatsoever goeth into the mouth, passeth into the belly, and is cast out into the draught? But the things that proceed out of the mouth come forth out of the heart, and they defile the man. For out of the heart come forth evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, railings; these are the things that defile the man; but to eat with unwashen hands defileth not the man."

In these searching passages we have the essence of Christianity. It is a faith that plants religion not at the circumference, but at the centre of life. It makes custom of little account, and motive all-important. It judges of men not by what they profess, but by what they are. It grades human sins in a fresh, real, self-evidencing order, which finds an ally and a witness in every man's conscience. For appearance it substitutes reality; for ritual, right; for ceremonial cleanness, cleanness of mind. "Blessed are the pure—in heart." In thus reversing the order of things as He found them in the high places of His day, He revealed a new art of life, and spiritualised as well as ethicised religion, till it became the expression of the universal soul. Nothing more absolute can be conceived than such a faith as this; it is a seed that can blossom and bear fruit under every sky and in every soil.

III.

Let us come a little nearer to this Beatitude, and consider what it means in its essentials.

“In heart.” “The heart . . . stands in our Lord’s words for the whole interior man, the soul with all the faculties of intelligence and volition. It includes, therefore, the memory, which retains the knowledge concerning the past, present, and future, which has been communicated to the mind, the reason, or intellect, which considers, reflects, compares, and concludes, and the will, which chooses, decides, and resolves. It embraces the affections, the feelings, the emotions, the imagination, the whole varied working of the intelligence and the will. This is the true man, and the life of this is his true life; and it is capable of the utmost foulness and corruption, as well as the most sublime purity and activity. Out of the heart are the issues of life.”* It is thus easy to see that as a man thinketh in his heart, so is he; and that if his heart is pure, he is pure through and through.

Blessed are the “pure.” By heart-purity we mean first of all *simplicity*. A man of pure heart is “simplex,” has no “folds” or concealments in him; as he appears to be, so he is. It means *singleness of*

* *The Sermon on the Mount*, by H. J. Coleridge (pp. 271-2).

purpose—whole-heartedness, freedom from duplicity and double-mindedness. A man of pure heart is one whose "will is set straight for God," carrying with it the whole range of feelings, motives, and instincts, as a loyal army is swept forward to victory by a trusted general in one multiplex but undivided unit. It means, above all, *spirituality of temper*. It is the life of soul triumphing over sense, spirit rising above matter, the higher self ruling over the lower. It is the coming to birth of the God-like in man, the flower reaching out to the sunlight, the wing straining after the blue sky, the river seeking the sea which is its origin and home.

There is no form of life that deserves the benediction "blessed" more than this. It is not a life of pleasure, though it is capable of the highest enjoyment of all the pleasurable elements of life. It is not necessarily a life of happiness, though it takes keen delight in all the sinless sources of satisfaction—the beauty of nature, human affection, the pursuit of any great and beneficent purpose; and it tends to promote a happy harmony between the soul and its earthly environment. But being set on the highest things, it is not unduly disturbed when the lower elements of experience are painful and disappointing, and it has the magic gift of finding the divine kernel of good in the hard, bitter rind of sorrow and trouble. Therefore is it "blessed," whatever may happen, and however it may be called upon to suffer, for it knows the meaning of the gracious law of life embodied in

the words, "All things work together for good to them that love God."

IV.

But there is a particular promise attached to this as to all the Beatitudes—for they shall see God. The "Beatific Vision" is the reward of the "pure in heart."

Once more we must note that this promise is no haphazard blessing, but a spiritual law. It follows as a matter of course. The relation between the quality described and the result that follows is one of cause and effect. The pure in heart shall see God, because that is the only way in which He can be approached, realised, and received into the soul.

For what are the hindrances which becloud or blot out the divine vision from the soul of man? Just those things opposed to "purity of heart" in the large and broad sense in which we have been considering it—double-mindedness, the tyranny of sense over soul, the dominance of the carnal nature over the spiritual. There is nothing which the worldly man is so certainly debarred from as the vision of God. Whenever he turns, momentarily, from the carnal pleasures or absorbing mundane aims of his habitual life—which he sees so plainly, and grasps with so sure a hand—to the facts of the spiritual order, he is surrounded as by a fog, and thick dark-

ness envelops him. He is "blind of heart," therefore, "seeing he sees, but perceives not," and "hearing he hears, but does not understand." The language of the spirit is a foreign language to him, for he lives in another world, and knows not its alphabet. "The natural man knoweth not the things of the Spirit of God."

But to the "pure," all things are pure. In everything they find spiritual meanings. A divine thread of purpose is seen running through the whole material order. The throb of a divine heart is felt in all the events and vicissitudes of life. They find God in the flowering fields, in the mighty procession of the stars, in the systole and diastole of nature's multitudinous flow of life, and in the events of their personal lot and experience. And when such souls turn their thoughts inward to the world within them, they find that they are never alone, but are conscious of "Another who is not another, whose fellowship is ever with them, and in whose friendship they do find the life which is life indeed." By cultivating this fellowship with God, the power of "seeing" Him, and of being possessed by the illumination of His spirit, grows steadily as life goes on; and when the bodily vision dims, the inner light glows with increasing radiance and power to life's end. As the soul is purified in the seven times heated furnace of discipline and trial, and the dross of sin is burned away, it gains the power to realise and appropriate the divine till it is "all and in all" to them. At

first, like the morning star shining in the grey east, it becomes at last the broadening light of the perfect day.

There is no blessedness like that which comes in the train of this divine vision. It is the life of lives, the joy of all joy, the bliss of all bliss. You and I know of nothing that so enriches and rewards the soul, and gives it a sense of having attained to its ultimate desire, as to "know" God, and so to be filled with the life of God.

How to attain this end? By cultivating the "pure heart." "Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed thereto according to thy word." . . . "Who shall ascend to the hill of the Lord? And who shall stand in His holy place? He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart, who hath not lifted up his hands unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully. He shall receive the blessing from the Lord, and righteousness from the God of his salvation." So early in the history of true religion did His law of purity begin to glow and glisten before the soul. And reaching across the ages, we find the Beloved Disciple giving the final utterance to the same beautiful and inevitable law. "We know that if He shall be manifested we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. *And everyone that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as He is pure.*"

Lord, cleanse our hearts from all dross and evil, from the love of the world, "from the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eye, and the pride of life," from

the love of self and all its darkening influences, so that, our souls being set upon Thee in all singleness and sincerity, we may truly love Thee, and be found worthy to receive the beatific vision, and at last to be received into Thine everlasting presence and fellowship !

PEACEMAKERS, AND SONS
OF GOD

BY REV. E. GRIFFITH-JONES, B.A.

PEACEMAKERS, AND SONS OF GOD

“Blessed are the peacemakers : for they shall be called the children of God.”—MATTHEW v. 9.

THIS Beatitude naturally connects itself with the third, peaceableness being really meekness carried to a higher pitch of development ; and it connects itself also closely with the fifth. The meek man bears wrong with sweetness of temper ; the peacemaker, like the merciful man, endeavours actively to extend the area of good-will between men, and communities, and nations. We must distinguish it from that meddling disposition which interferes foolishly in other men's quarrels, and ends generally with making matters worse instead of better. It implies wisdom, diplomacy, and tact, as well as kindliness. When the true peacemaker appears, we recognise that he has great moral strength behind him, and a power of appeal which enlists the better nature of men on the side of gentleness

and generosity. It is true that both sides in the quarrel often misunderstand him, and sometimes hate him worse than they hate each other; but that is a temporary accident in the evolution of the higher virtues. Ultimately, such a disposition is recognised and honoured as God-like. Jesus helped to awaken the deep response of the best instincts of humanity when He pronounced this Beatitude—"Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God."

How true to His Gospel of love and reconciliation is this beautiful saying! Jesus revealed God as the Universal Father, who, in virtue of the atonement offered by the Eternal Son, is already at peace with men, though they are rebels against His holy truth and love. Inevitably, therefore, are those who are active peacemakers the sons and daughters of the Most High; for they repeat on the lower scale of this little world His crowning attribute. There is no one so God-like as the man who plants the standard of amity and brotherhood a furlong or two further into the chaos of strife and hatred.

Naturally we think, in view of this saying of our Lord, of that terrible principle of strife which has from the beginning dogged and hampered the upward development of the world—the scourge of war. We will look at it chiefly in relation to this fact.

I.

It has been well said that though all history is the record of war, it is also the record of the decline of war.

There has for many centuries past been a slow but steady recognition of the evils of war ; and recently this feeling has been spreading with increased speed and power among the nations. Instead of being the main business of men, as in the earlier times, it has become at last an unpleasant episode in the story of nations ; its duties have been gradually given over by the many into the hands of a professional few ; and we have ceased to exalt the warrior as the noblest of men. Let me give you a striking proof of the advance made in our own ideas as Englishmen since the time of Good Queen Bess—only three centuries since. Here is an extract from a letter written by Cavendish the explorer, who—we are told—was thought to be a good Christian in his times, on his return from a voyage of discovery round the world :—

“*September 1588.*—It hath pleased Almighty God,” he says, “to suffer me to circumpass the whole globe of the earth ; entering in at the Straits of Magellan, and returning by the Cape of Good Hope ; in the voyage I have either discovered or brought certain

intelligence of all the rich places of the world, which were ever discovered by any Christian. I navigated along the coast of Peru, Chili, and New Spain, where I made great spoils. I burnt and sunk nineteen sails of ships, small and great. All the villages and towns I ever landed at I burnt and spoiled. And had I not been discovered upon the coast, I had taken great quantity of treasure. The matter of most profit to me was a great ship of the King [*i.e.*, of Spain] which I took in California, etc." Such was the kind of boasting that could be publicly made in those early days of the Reformation which has since truly revolutionised the world, and this pious and rascally freebooter could smugly preface such a record of wanton and shameful crime with the words "It hath pleased Almighty God!" Such were the moral standards of the day. What would we now think if one of our good sailors came back from a modern voyage with such a blasphemous record on his lips? There is not a politician who would not promptly disown him; not a Government, except, perhaps, that of Turkey, who would not clap him in prison, and perhaps execute him as a moral madman too dangerous to live.

I mention this in order to impress on you the fact that the world has really been passing through a vital change of sentiment on this subject, and that with all our terrible and crushing armaments in Europe, there is a healthier and nobler ideal abroad. When we look round us and note how the air is still

filled with wars and rumours of wars, and is electric with martial forebodings and fears, we doubt sometimes whether any progress has been made. It is only when we read such a passage as this that the slow but sure moral progress of the world can be measured and realised.

What is it that has wrought this change, and is working it now? There are many causes; but the one I wish to deal with to-night is the most potent and the most noble. It is the power of the Bible; it is the teaching of Jesus Christ, the influence of His words, and life, and death, and triumph over death, revealed in this great and matchless Book. Only for about 300 years has this Book been really the property of the common people. During these years it has been slowly but surely leavening thought, softening men's minds towards one another, lifting high before their eyes a loftier ideal, a purer manhood, a nobler destiny, and by the picture it has impressed on the world's heart of a divine life. Supreme through its lowliness, victorious through its meekness, triumphant through sacrifice and death, it has weaned men from devil-worship, to the worship of God, as the Father and Lover of mankind. The god of war, with his wrathful eyes, and puckered brow, and bloodstained sword, is fading into the distance; the Prince of Peace, with the reed in His hands and the heaven of universal love like an aureole round His blessed countenance, is slowly ascending His eternal throne. Above the roar of cannon and the tramp of

hurrying hosts, we hear a still small voice preaching a sweeter evangel. Its watchwords are the Fatherhood of God, the Sonship of humanity, the Brotherhood of mankind. Its laws are these: "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the sons of God." . . . "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth." . . . "Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good." . . . "If thine enemy hunger, feed him, if he be thirsty, give him to drink." The sovereignty of meekness, the sweet revenges of forgiveness, the victory of love over hate—these are the paradoxes on which it builds its everlasting throne; and its language is now being heard in the ends of the earth. Men, it is true, are but slowly being drawn to listen; but little by little it is winning its way. Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace, is beginning to reign, and when His authority is supreme, of His sovereignty there shall be no end.

II.

It is one of the laws of all great reformations that they begin with individuals, then penetrate social relations, and lastly become principles of politics.

Let us see how far this ideal of manhood developed in the Gospels—the ideal of the *Sovereignty of the Peacemaker*—has made its way.

Take family life, which is the first school of the virtues. There are two possible ways of dealing with little children. "If you fly at your child, and say, 'You imp of perdition, you! what have you been doing?' the little imp of perdition may not dare to say what he has been doing, but there is hell in it, and you have waked it up. You have seen parents go to their children thus with wrath; and you have also seen parents meet their children with patience and sweetness and love. You have seen an infuriated child rush at its mother and strike her. The mother looks down at the child kindly and gently. The child strikes her again, but not half as hard as at first. She continues to manifest sweetness toward it; and at length the child throws itself into her arms and cries. The mother has not said a word, but her meekness has subdued the passion of the child, for what one feels with power wakes up the same feeling in another." And so the law of sovereignty in all wise families has been seen to be the law of meekness.

Take friendship, which is the next school of the virtues, as we have already seen. Up till less than a hundred years ago, there was an unwritten law that no man could afford to brook an insult from his friend without challenging him to a duel. If he did not do so, he would be branded as a coward, and shut out from society. It was felt that a deadly blow to good manners had been dealt by the man who passed an insult by without retaliating. That is still so

among some continental nations. But we have learnt to see the folly and shame of this habit of duelling over trifles, or at all. Have we lost anything in giving up that law of revenge? Is not human life sweeter, saner, happier, since we gave it up? We have come to see that the best answer to an insult is to let it pass, to refuse to be angry, and to suffer it to work out its own punishment. And so less provocation is given back, less is taken, and the bully and the bravo find themselves out of court in all decent society.

So far we have learnt the lesson of Jesus Christ, though we are not always faithful to it. And if as yet we have not quite mastered the secret in wider relations, it is because we have not attained to a worthy idea of what peaceableness really is. We think of it too much as a mere still, quiet, unfighting disposition. It often shows itself to be so; but the essence of peaceableness, which is meekness in active operation, is that, being the spirit of the whole man, it must include in its operation the reason, the moral sentiments, the social affections, and the passions and appetites. It is all the faculties within, acting in a given spirit or temper. Meekness, as we have seen, is "the holding in of the entire mind, when in great activity, and especially when under provocation, in a calm, sweet, and gentle mood, so that its action shall proceed from its higher and divine, and not its lower or animal nature. Therefore it has in it great calmness, self-control, faith, trust, hope—and when

developed into peaceableness, it becomes that high and radiant state of mind in which all the faculties actively co-operate in promoting among men the sweetness of the faith of God, and the spirit of sympathy and love which is of God." It is the best side of man under provocation maintaining itself in the best mood, and because it controls itself, controlling all others as well. That is what peaceableness is, and that is why it is a power.

Can there be any doubt that this spirit is to be the dominant ideal of the future? Are not such men instinctively honoured, even in worldly society? Are they not instinctively felt to be the children of God? It is because we have thinned down and watered the meaning of these Beatitudes of Christ into a shadow, and confounded them with mere pale, negative imitations, that we have not been able to believe in them, and have almost been ashamed of them. But when a man such as I have described appears, all men in their saner moods bend the knee to him. He can afford to go forth unarmed among savages as Livingstone did, and when they know him for what he is, they will not touch a hair of his head, but will be his bodyguard across a continent. And even though a blind passion may hide his true character from men, and they slay him in their hate, as men did Livingstone's Master and Lord, they will ere long awake to their deed, and build a temple in which to worship his memory, where once they hounded him to his death. He was the first-born of these "children of God."

III.

But how, you still ask, and it is a natural question, can we ever come to this mood in our national policy ?

Can we dare to disown ourselves in the presence of innumerable enemies, burn our ships, melt our cannon down, and disband our army and navy ? We acknowledge the sovereignty of meekness in our private lives and in social life, and in a measure in business life—but can we dare, without inviting self-destruction, act on this principle as a nation—until the others do the same ?

These questions show that we have not grasped the right idea yet. We are still enthralled with the negation side of the virtue of peaceableness. No nation can afford to disarm itself till it has learnt the action side as well. Sixty years ago Emerson, writing on this subject, said these weighty words :—“ If you have a nation of men who have risen to that height of moral cultivation that they will not declare war, or carry arms, for they have not so much madness left in their brains, you have a nation of lovers, of benefactors, of true, great, and noble men. Let me know more of that nation ; I shall not find them defenceless, with idle hands hanging at their sides. I shall find them men of love, honour, and truth ; men of an immense

industry ; men whose influence is felt to the ends of the earth ; men whose very look and voice carry a sentence of honour and shame ; and all forces yield to their energy and persuasion. Whenever we see the doctrine of peace embraced by a nation, we may be sure it will not be one that invites inquiry, but one, on the contrary, which has a friend in the bottom of the heart of every man, even of the violent and the base ; one against which no weapon can prosper ; one which is looked on as an asylum of the human race, and has the tears and the blessings of men."

If these words are true—and who can doubt them?—we can say that a nation can afford to disarm itself as soon as its continued existence in a state of liberty is more desirable to the other nations of the earth than its destruction or conquest. In other words, a truly Christian nation can at once venture to disarm itself, because the world cannot afford, for its own sake, to hurt it. What was it that made Livingstone—to return a moment to that honoured name—safer in the heart of Africa, without sword or revolver in his possession, with only an unarmed native servant or two in his train—than Stanley with his band of followers, armed to the teeth? Livingstone was defenceless, so far as physical weapons were concerned. He was at the mercy of every bushman's poisoned arrow, of every savage's spear and assegai ; and yet for thirty years he went fearlessly, trustfully, across the most barbarous portions of the earth, without wound or

harm, and woe betide the savage who would dare to shed his blood. On the contrary, we all know how Stanley was obliged to go warily, foot by foot, through the trackless forest; how he had to fight many a pitched battle, and yet was glad enough to get away with a whole skin. Where lay the difference? In this—that Livingstone believed in his creed, and acted up to it; he “went about doing good” as the friend and benefactor of man, strong in his humility, grand in his helpfulness and meekness; he appealed to the friend in every man, and found the friend in every man, so that to-day his name is a name to conjure by in the darkest places in Africa as well as in the brightest spot in Christendom. “Blessed are the peacemakers.”

And of nations as well as men is it true that when they learn to trust each other, they will cease trying to conquer each other. “One of the noblest things that Count Cavour ever said was that the diplomatist who distrusted men would make more mistakes than the diplomatist who trusted men. There was the breathing of the Spirit of the Gospel in that. Diplomacy has been said to be like a lot of serpents coiled together, wily and cunning, and striving for the mastery; but Count Cavour took a higher view of it. His was a great nature. . . . Cavour perceived that a diplomacy that trusted men, which had confidence in them, which was beneficent toward them, would get a response from them, on the whole, more favourable, less fraught

with evil, than a diplomacy which distrusted them and sought to govern them by craft." And we must pray God to send us more Cavours, and fewer Bismarcks, that the era of universal peace may dawn.

IV.

And now, a word or two on the policy of Christian Churches and of Christian men in this matter. How are we to bring this age of gold to pass?

1. *The first secret is to have faith in God, and to live according to that principle.*

People say we are not ripe for this idea of disarmament. *The world is ripe for whatever it believes in.* Was the world ripe for Christianity when Jesus died, and Paul preached? Was Europe ripe for the Reformation when Luther nailed the Pope's Bull to the church door, and when the martyrs were flaming in Smithfield market-place? The world is never ripe for anything till someone takes the lead, *and then it is ripe for anything.* Not while we are half-hearted in our faith in Christ, in His teaching, in His commandments, can we do this thing, but as soon as we have real, unquestioning faith in peace, even so much as a grain of mustard seed, we shall cast this old mountain of war into the midst of the sea.

2. *Secondly, we must put our faith on a right basis, and go to work in the right spirit.*

If we plead for peace in the spirit of cowardice, because we wish to save our own skins, because courage, and high enterprise, and daring, and honour are dead, we shall fail, and we ought to fail. I think we ought to be a little ashamed of the pleas sometimes put forward in the name of peace. I notice that in much of the "peace literature" of the day, great emphasis is put on the horrors of war, on its suffering, and woe, and cruelty. That is all true, and it should be fully remembered. But there is a higher plea that needs to be borne in mind. "There is something worse than suffering. It is *wrong*. It is injustice, it is oppression. It is waste of life. It is the devil in man's heart. It is because war is wrong, self-defeating, futile, out-of-date, unworthy of Christian truth and humanity, that we should denounce it. It is the enemy of the soul; it is the policy of damnation and hell; therefore we should do away with it." Not till we rise into this point of view, and persuade the world of it, shall we succeed. Christ came to proclaim the eternal worth of man; and it is because war differentiates man, and destroys him, that it is un-Christian and wrong.

3. *And then, lastly, we must approach this matter in the spirit of wisdom as well as zeal.*

"Everything great must be done in the spirit of greatness." Quixotic schemes will defeat themselves. We must be statesmen as well as enthusiasts. I do

not see any practicable way as yet of doing away altogether with the soldier. He is still wanted in the world. It is true that national armies among civilised nations are no longer wanted. We want to do away with the English, the French, the German, the Russian, and every other separate army. These peoples have no real reason for quarrelling. Their interests are identical, and their policy should be friendly, and trustful, and brotherly. Their quarrels and misunderstandings should be settled by arbitration, as has been done again and again—more frequently than most people know. But what we still want is an international army, that shall be possessed in common by all civilised nations, to be used for purely civilised and humanitarian purposes, for the suppression of slavery, for the development of progress, for the security of the weak, for the restraint and fear of the strong, for the defence of the persecuted and the oppressed. The last and final function of the soldier is, therefore, to be an international police, having the lives, and liberties, the welfare of the peoples of the world, under his ward and keeping.

These are the lines along which the lovers of peace and good-will among men may safely work. Let us remember that they make great demands on our faith, hope, and love. Only as we practice the cardinal virtues ourselves will they ever qualify us to advocate them in the world at large. Let us begin at home, and be centres of generous, kindly regard among all

who have dealings with us, then we shall be able to take our place in the ranks of the growing army of peacemakers, who shall finally reduce war and strife, whether national, industrial, and social, into an anachronism and an absurdity.

PERSECUTED, YET TRIUMPHANT

BY REV. E. GRIFFITH-JONES, B.A.

PERSECUTED, YET TRIUMPHANT

“Blessed are they that are persecuted for righteousness sake : for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”—MATTHEW v. 10.

THE presence of this “law of the kingdom” among the Beatitudes is a remarkable witness to the perfect frankness and openness of our Lord’s method of exposition. His revelation was progressive, and He carefully graded His teaching according to the capacity of His audience to “bear” its unfolding contents ; and in the case of unsympathetic hearers, He could safeguard His doctrines from being misinterpreted by veiling them in imaginative and parabolic forms. But never from the beginning did He conceal from His followers the pains and penalties of discipleship. The difficulties of the New Life were ever put into the forefront, and only after adequately weighing the cost did He encourage men to rank themselves among His followers. With a divine courage, therefore, He crowns the list of these fair virtues with this startling Beatitude. The inherent difficulty of each is emphasised by the fact implied here, that the more a man has attained to the

round of Christian virtues in such a world as this, the more certain is he to find his lot a hard one. He will meet hatred where he might reasonably look for appreciation, and persecution in place of the honour which is his rightful due. But there is here a deeper courage even than that implied in Christ's frankness. The persecution awaiting the good man in this world is proclaimed to be not an unpleasant incident, but a step towards the very blessedness he is seeking. His people are to count themselves happy *because* of the suffering entailed by the perfect life. Solemnly He emphasises and enlarges on this strange feature. "Blessed are ye when men shall reproach you, and persecute you, and speak all manner of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad, for great is your reward in heaven; for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you."

I.

The Fire that Refines.

Let us be clear as to the kind of suffering here implied. This special benediction is not bestowed on any form of pain, nor on any form of persecution. The suffering must be of a special kind, and the persecution for a particular reason. The sorrow of bereavement, the anguish of bearing the sins of

others, the patient endurance of punishment for our own sins, or of calamities that fall on us through personal malice and hatred—all these forms of suffering have often to be met by Christian people, and when worthily borne, they all have their special compensations and purifying influence on the soul. But none of these come within the scope of this benediction. That is reserved for those who suffer “for righteousness sake,” that is, for those who have to bear personal or social hatred, or political disabilities and penalties, because of their faith, their virtue, their championship of forgotten and down-trodden causes, their advocacy of unpopular but essentially right principles of legislation, of religious liberty, of equal justice between man and man, of anything that tells for the welfare and progress of mankind. Men and women who witness in any way for a higher standard of living, and who in doing so face the lower standards of the world with meek but unflinching condemnation, are sure to meet with persecution of some sort; and our Lord tells us that endurance of this persecution in a sweet but determined spirit, is a blessed thing. Their sufferings are a purifying fire as regards their own character, and are a part of the divine machinery whereby the kingdom of God is advanced and made dominant in the world.

II.

The Kindling of the Fire.

Theoretically, it is a matter of perplexity that, in a world of moral beings, there should be anything but honour and blessing for those who advocate and exemplify a higher standard of living. Moral beauty, spiritual holiness, social justice, are things so admirable in themselves, and appeal so inevitably to the conscience, that we might imagine that the man who embodies such excellencies would be a universal hero.

But this is not so practically. We live in a world where evil has deep roots, not only in the institutions of society, but in the hearts of men. There is nothing they dislike more than to be faced by a standard of conduct, and by principles of right, which they are not prepared to follow. The very fact that their conscience bears witness to these things, and condemns their unsympathetic attitude towards them, only deepens their wrath and enmity against those who thrust them on their notice. There is no deeper hatred than that borne by the really bad man against the really good man. His very existence is an offence, and in extreme cases nothing short of his entire destruction will satisfy his enemies. The only perfect Being this world has seen was crucified and slain by "wicked hands," and

the attitude of the world towards Him is more or less its attitude towards those who follow Him faithfully and loyally ever since.

It is a part of the order of things that progress in the moral as well as the physical world is by way of conflict. All physical life means struggle between conflicting forces, and this struggle is a part of the perfecting process by which every form of life becomes efficient, and strong, and perfect, each in its kind. All spiritual life also means struggle between conflicting forces—the forces of stagnation against those of progress, the forces of the lower nature against those of the higher, the forces of the actual against those of the ideal. This struggle goes on within the soul itself; “for the flesh lusteth after the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh, for these are contrary the one to the other,” and it ever goes on in society at large, where the natural schism is repeated on a more colossal scale. And whereas the principle of the Spirit is love and peace, it has to meet the principle of warfare and hatred at a disadvantage. The struggle thus appears to be a very unequal one. All the chances seem on the side of the lower against the higher. For while the higher has to depend on its own inherent worth for its victory, the lower has all the advantage of unscrupulous attack, and bitter animosity, and tireless resources on its side. In such a world as this, it often seems almost incredible that moral progress should be at all possible; and the fact that progress

is, on the whole, steady, is a certain proof that the might of God is behind it. Blessed, therefore, says the Master, are those who are on His side, and are willing to bear the pains and persecutions which they encounter in behalf of His truth and love. They are filling up that which is behind of the sufferings of Christ ; and He is pledged, at last, to "bring forth" their "righteousness" (which is His righteousness) "unto victory."

III.

The Working of the Purifying Fire.

We pass to the blessedness which is theirs who suffer for any good cause.

This is two-fold according to the teaching of our Lord and His apostles. There is the effect on themselves ; and there is the effect on the world which hates them, but in whose real interests they are bearing their burden of sorrow and pain.

1. *The subjective effects of persecution are referred to in many places in the New Testament.*

When we turn to the earlier records of the people of God, as in the summary given in that glorious eleventh chapter of the Hebrews, we recognise at once that there is no school of heroism like the furnace of persecution. It was the privilege of the Hebrews to develop a new type of greatness.

Among the Greeks, we see how great the intellect can become by severe discipline under favourable social conditions. Among the Romans and other conquering nations, we see how great the will can become under the stress of perpetual political struggle and racial conflict. There were intellects of supreme power, and personalities of dominant force, developed among the Hebrews also; but the distinctive greatness of their race was that evolved through suffering for great principles of faith and conduct. The heroes of the Bible were men who knew how to endure, and who, like their great Master and Type, "were made perfect by suffering." These patriarchs, conquerors, prophets, psalmists, and leaders endured the loss of all things for conscience sake; they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth, seeking a better country; they saw great truths and they gave their lives to witness to them; and they "all died, not having received the promise, God having provided some better thing for them, that they without us should not be made perfect." This was a new type of greatness; and its value lies in this—that they were pioneers in the line of all the moral and spiritual progress that the world has ever made since.

Looking more closely at the way in which persecution for righteousness sake ennobles men, we find its benefit working in three different directions. First, there is the fact that to give ourselves to the advocacy of great principles and causes enlarges and enriches character. There is nothing that so saves us from

pettiness as to throw ourselves on the side of what is right and good ; nothing that so well disciplines the will, and sweetens the temper, and widens the sympathies. And when we have to suffer for our convictions, if only we do so in a large and generous spirit, forgetting the injustice in the privilege, the whole atmosphere of our life is purified, and our souls are mellowed into ripeness. Secondly, we are saved from that self-seeking which is the chief bane of our nature. Anything that turns the thoughts away from self, and fixes them on something great and good without us, deepens character, opens out its best elements, and makes life a new thing to us. How many petty jealousies, miseries, and disappointments are they saved from who have no personal ends to serve, and who are prepared to stake everything for the victory of a cause that commands their passionate and undivided homage ! There is no one more miserable than the man who is absorbed in self and its narrow interests ; there is no blessedness more real than to be saved from this ignoble tyranny. And, thirdly, persecution for righteousness sake ennobles men, because it throws them back on the divine resources and fellowship. It brings us into a fresh relation with our Master, when we realise that we are suffering in His cause. The soldier who has fought for his country feels a new kind of patriotism throbbing in his veins, and the Christian who stands in the "thin red line" in the spiritual Waterloos of the world, and knows what it is to be wounded in the heavenly strife, becomes

the comrade as well as the follower of the Captain of our salvation.

2. But there is another effect wrought by persecution nobly and unflinchingly borne. There is no better way of helping a good cause in the world than by suffering for it.

From the beginning "the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church." The murder of Stephen led to the conversion of St Paul. During the Roman Empire every successive wave of persecution that passed over the Church, instead of leaving her exhausted and decimated, gave her fresh life and vigour. Wherever the fires of hatred have burned against the faith, they have purified it always, but defeated it never. Every repulse has been a victory in disguise. It would seem, indeed, as though the great enemy of religion were prosperity, not adversity. And the reason is not far to seek. As light shines brightest in darkness, so the peculiar virtues of Christianity stand forth more clearly and boldly and impressively against a background of opposition and seeming disaster, than in the daylight of ease and outward favour. Not only so, but these virtues are called out best under such circumstances. And when this is so, they always win large numbers of the enemy over to the side of the down-trodden but triumphant faith. For there is one thing from which the world cannot withhold its admiration, and that is, the spectacle of men who believe in their religion, and who manifest its unconquerable energy by their

willingness to suffer for it. For one man who has been persuaded to become a Christian through argument and appeal, there are a hundred who have been won over by the influence of suffering, Christ-like lives. The martyrs, not the theologians, have been the true apologists of the Faith.

IV.

The Fruit of the Refining Fire.

So we come again to the word "Blessed," and the reason for it. There is a Beatitude for the persecuted, and, as they are the same people as have manifested these other excellencies, we find that our Lord returns to the point from which He started, and repeats the blessing which includes all the seven others, as the sunray includes the seven colours of the rainbow. "Blessed are they that are persecuted for righteousness sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven!"

How deep and high is the optimism that lies behind these words! What insight had this wonderful Teacher who could emphasise with so unsparing a hand the pains and penalties of discipleship, and could yet see, beyond the shadow of the flood, the glorious issue of it all! Truly, as we have already seen, Christianity is the religion of optimism; but it

is an optimism that comes by way of pessimism. "In the world ye shall have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world." The light rises out of thick darkness; but it is the light of an eternal day.

We shall see, in the concluding discourse of this series, that the future is with the Beatitudes of Jesus Christ. Meanwhile, let us return for a moment to a point already touched on in passing, and consider the *loftiness* and the *nearness* of the virtues here successively outlined for us.

It is a trite commonplace of unthinking criticism among a certain class that the teaching of the Sermon on the Mount (which is only the Beatitudes writ large) is in some way opposed to the teachings of the creeds, and, in their desire to disparage dogma, they glibly say: "As for us, we are content with the religion of the Sermon on the Mount." Do they realise in the remotest degree the claim which they make? The qualities which are enforced here are in a sense such qualities as are of the warp and woof of our common human nature; but in another sense they are transcendent in their loftiness and greatness. Nothing less than the *truths* of Christianity can support its *ideals*, as Alpine snows can only be lifted into the inaccessible skies by the broad-based mountains on which they rest, and of which they are the crown and glory. The snows would not be there but for the mountains; and the Beatitudes would be

unsubstantial as sunrise-clouds but for the mighty truths that underlie them. The basis of all virtue is faith ; and a man's religion will be great and fruitful in practical goodness, only as his creed is adequate to inspire and support it. Behind, beneath, and above these Beatitudes of Christ, then, we see the theology of Christ. They are the tangible embodiment of His doctrines of the Fatherhood and atoning grace of God, of the worth and possibilities of the soul, and of the immortality which alone can give them adequate scope to fructify and ripen. Apart from these truths, of which they are the lovely blossoms, they are perishable as cut flowers displayed in a beautiful but barren vase ; rooted in these truths, they are like the flowers of the spring, testifying to the bridal of earth and sky, and carrying in their delicate but hardy petals all the promise of summer and pomp of autumn.

“On earth the broken arcs, in Heaven the perfect round.”

THE MAN THAT IS TO BE

BY REV. E. GRIFFITH-JONES, B.A.

THE MAN THAT IS TO BE

"Be ye therefore perfect, as your Father in heaven is perfect."—MATTHEW v. 48.

THROUGHOUT this study of the Beatitudes, one point to which attention has already been called has been increasingly impressed upon us, that the kind of character here unfolded is an indivisible unity. We have been dealing, not with a group of individuals, each possessing one or other of these excellencies, but with one sovereign type, of which each successive quality is as it were a separate facet. It is one disposition, not eight, that has been presented to our vision in progressive aspects ; and, as we have seen, the essential quality of which all the Beatitudes are tributary elements is the spirit of Christ-like love. Love in lowliness, in sorrow for sin, in gentle endurance, in aspiration and yearning, in sweet revenge, in charity and purity, in influence, in unconquerable endurance—these are all manifestations of that central glow of outgoing charity towards God and man which is the essence of the Christian life. "Now remaineth faith, hope, love—these three ; and the greatest of these is love." This is the vestal flame

that burns everlastingly on the altar of the Christly soul, and consecrates all it is and has to the service of the highest, for the benefit of the lowest. But here a difficulty appears.

A friend recently told the writer how pained he was to find among many of his intelligent worldly acquaintances, a total lack of appreciation of the type of character enjoined in the Sermon on the Mount. The general impression left by the picture as a whole, to a casual glance, is of effeminacy and weakness, rather than of manly vigour and force. It thus fails to appeal to many who are not otherwise unsympathetic towards religion. And above all, it appears to many to be something eminently unpractical and sterile in its application to the actual affairs and conditions of life. "It is a beautiful and charming picture of a far-away ideal ; but it will not do as an actual programme in this fiercely-struggling, work-a-day world." This is not a carping criticism, but a very wide and deeply felt difficulty, which finds an echo in the secret heart of many a Christian man and woman.

In this, our concluding study of the Beatitudes, let us frankly face this trouble. Unless some light can be thrown on it, we shall find ourselves half-hearted and slack, where whole-heartedness is of the utmost importance ; and naturally, we shall fail both in advocating this ideal on others and in reducing it to practice ourselves. We have already touched on the subject lightly in passing ; but we must now look at the matter squarely and firmly in the face.

It is my purpose to endeavour to show that the Christian type of character is not only the highest of all types, but that it is the inevitable outcome of all the providential discipline and education of the race throughout the ages ; that it is the only truly admirable type ever presented to us for our following ; that it is becoming growingly practical in daily life, as the Christian spirit continues to permeate human society ; and that the future belongs to it, to the exclusion of every lower type. It has, in one word, the quality of unwearying and unconquerable persistence ; like the love of which it is the perfect human embodiment, *it abides*, being, indeed, the fruit of love's immortal and undying life.

I.

It will help us to consider that analogy of the "seed" which is so often used by Jesus Christ in His exposition of the principle of the kingdom of God.

A seed is the link between the living forms of the past and those of the future. It contains the fruit of all the vital process and progress of bygone harvests ; it contains the potency and promise of all harvests to come. All that Nature has striven for, all that she has accomplished in the way of development in the ascending scales of life, all she is now aiming at in

further evolution, is enshrined in that little seed-pod which seems so inert and insignificant.

Now there are two striking features that meet us in considering all seed-forms. The first is their apparent frailty and helplessness. It would seem as though there could be nothing quite so helpless as that tiny, formless mass of life, which we entrust to the untender mercies of the soil and the weather. It is the sport of wind and rain, heat and cold, bill of bird, or hoof of beast. It has no active weapons of defence or attack. If we take an individual seed in our hand, and plant it, the chances are greatly against its ever coming to perfection. In the face of all the ungenial conditions that may surround it, it has nothing to present but its own inherent vitality. The second feature of seed-life, however, corrects our first impression. That feature is, the infinitely varied and ingenious care taken by Nature to ensure the continuance of each species of life. First of all, she encases her seeds in pods or pulp or rind or shell, by all manner of strange devices, each suited to its *habitat* and conditions of life, and each subtly calculated to give it a chance in the stern struggle for existence that is always going on. Then, she provides for such an overflow of productiveness, that if one or a dozen or a hundred seeds fail to get to perfection, there are plenty more ready to take advantage of the favourable conditions that remain. And, finally, she has provided a "pre-ordained harmony" of adaptation between seed and soil, so that when such favour-

able conditions are met, the two react on each other, and seed and environment co-operate to produce the plant, "first the blade, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear." Thus, on the whole, and in the long run, the most delicate plants, the tenderest flowers, the most helpless animals, succeed in renewing their species, and so the ultimate end and aim of Nature is ever fulfilled, so that "climbing through all the spires of form," she has arrived at Man—

"The heir of hopes too fair to turn out false."

All this is a parable of the higher life. We must not be perplexed or discouraged, that in the highest of all types of character that has been revealed, there seems to be so little that is aggressive, and virile, and dominant. The most violent forces of Nature are destructive; her constructive forces are almost always quiet, and gentle, and unseen in their workings. The earthquake rends the very earth, the volcano may split a mountain range, an ocean-storm may submerge an island. Yet these things are but breaks and dislocations in the quiet beneficent order of Nature; and when they are over, she resumes her unobtrusive operations as though they had never been. And in the spiritual life it is the same. There is more power in a smile than a frown; in the still small voice of conscience, than all the denunciations and fires of persecution; in the quiet appeal of the Beatitudes, than all the pomp and paraphernalia of warlike show and conquest. It is the gentle things

that endure ; it is the quiet forces of the spirit that persist. Anger is a hurricane that will pass ; love is a sunshine that remains. The storm may destroy one harvest ; but the sunshine will build up ten harvests out of the ruins of one. "History indeed," writes John Ruskin, "records twenty undoings for one deed, twenty desolations for one redemption, and thinks the fool and the villain potent as the wise and the good. But Nature and her laws recognise only the noble. Generations of the cruel pass like the darkness of locust plagues ; while one true and loving heart establishes a nation." The stars in their courses, therefore, and God in His heaven, fight on behalf of the spirit of love which is enshrined in the Beatitudes, and ensures its victory at last.

II.

The type of character in the Beatitudes is the inevitable fruit of the past discipline of the race in the paths of virtue and goodness.

That type is not an alien ideal dropped into the wild vortex of human nature. It is the fairest flower of the ages, the outcome of all the educative influences and operations of the world till now ; the fruit of all past, as it is the seed of all future, developments of the soul.

Professor Drummond, in his *Ascent of Man*, has done an incalculable service in showing that the higher virtues find their roots in the very subsoil of prehistoric times. He has shown how the ethical evolution of the race is the resultant of two forms of struggle seemingly irreconcilable, but ultimately coincident in producing the perfect soul. The first is *the struggle for self*, concentrated in the animal and spiritual appetites of the individual—the imperious impulse which drives us towards self-satisfaction on the one side and self-realisation on the other, and which finds its climax in the religious sphere, in the craving for personal salvation. The second is *the struggle for the life of others*, which finds its opportunity in the reproductive parental instinct—at first a purely animal impulse, finding its own pleasure in the love and care of offspring, but deepening and repairing at last into the mystic instinct of self-sacrifice on behalf of those loved better than one's own self and life—the law which finds its highest expression in willing martyrdom for one's home or land or religion, and above all in the sacrifice of Christ on the Cross, “the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God.”

The relation of these two laws of ethical and spiritual evolution is one that has gradually changed from antagonism into harmony. In the earlier ages of the world, when war was well-nigh universal, it seemed as though the self-regarding virtues—physical prowess, courage, self-preservation, lust of conquest and power—had an almost universal sway, and the “other-

regarding" virtues had but a very limited and scanty opportunity. But in the Providence of God, the very scourge of war afforded this opportunity; men from the beginning fought not simply for themselves but for wife and children, home and tribe and country, and they were constantly called on to sacrifice life itself in their behalf. Then in the paternal relation, a large scope was found for all the downward flowing unselfish impulses, the father having to work for the sustenance of the family, the mother for the care, and solace, and training of the little ones. With the rise of industrialism, and the decay of war, the struggle for existence and the struggle for the life of others assumed a gentler, more beneficent aspect, and the chasm between the self-regarding and the other-regarding impulses grew less and less marked. That chasm was finally bridged by the revelation of Jesus Christ, of which the Beatitudes are the final expression in character, and His Cross and Passion are its final expression in history. He has shown that there is no essential enmity between the two impulses so long dissevered and supposed to be incompatible; but that a man truly realises himself by serving others in the spirit of love, and that the salvation of our own souls is best realised through the principle of sacrifice for the good of others. "He that loveth his life shall lose it; but he that loseth his life for My sake shall find it." And it is this fine essence of the Christ-life that blossoms in these Beatitudes—the fruit of all the past ages of physical struggle and ethical evolu-

tion, the true marriage of earth and heaven, issuing in the rebirth and ripening of the soul.

Thus are the Beatitudes seen to be no alien principle, out of tune with the development of the race in the past, but its crown and pinnacle.

III.

But, it is still urged, true obedience to these laws of the Spirit is as yet impossible; they fail in practice, and are maxims of perfection, rather than laws for daily life. Some day, we are told, they may be possible, but not till society itself is regenerated, and Christ has triumphed.

In answer to this objection, I reply:—

1. *The Beatitudes have already been actually exemplified and incarnated in the life of our Lord Himself.*

In this programme of the ideal life we have a perfect portrait of Jesus Christ. There is not one of these virtues which He did not enshrine in His own person and life. He was meek and lowly of heart, He lived in utter dependence on the love and presence of His Heavenly Father; He sorrowed and wept over the sad ruin of the race He came to redeem (and what fruitful tears He shed for us)! He endured the scoffs and scorn and rejection of men with infinite patience and unembittered

love; He hungered and thirsted for food that the world knew not of—the righteousness of God, which was His passion and supreme delight: “He was pure of heart, who knew no sin, neither was guilt found in His mouth;” He was the peacemaker of the ages, reconciling the world to God, by the blood of His Cross having “slain the enmity” (happy phrase!) thereby; He bore persecution, ingratitude, and death “for righteousness sake,” that He might bring the kingdom of God about on earth; “Who, when He was reviled, reviled not again; when He suffered, He threatened not, but committed Himself to Him that judgeth righteously; who His own self bare our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness, by whose stripes we are healed.” Thus in every single particular the life of Jesus embodied each feature of His teaching at its climax. The type of character here described has, therefore, been actually and perfectly exemplified in history; and mankind already bows to it as the one ideal manhood of our race, the type to which we all feel we *ought* to conform, however far our practice may fall below its imperial and inevitable claims.

2. *Further, to the objection that the ideal character of the Beatitudes can only be practically attained in an ideal society, I reply that the only way to the ideal society is by the effort of his individual people to embody this ideal in their own lives.*

The Church of Christ is a community of individuals each pledged to “live the life” at all costs, with a

view to bring about the redeemed society which is supposed to be the only chance of the Beatitudes to be generally accepted. At first, the only answer of the world to the appeal of the Church was hatred, persecution, and threatened extermination. This, strangely enough, proved the opportunity of the Church to manifest the unconquerable vitality of her ideal, and to drive the roots of that ideal deep into the stubborn soil of humanity. So long as the Church practised her ideal, she won all along the line, and she succeeded in permanently affecting the social temper of Christendom. It was only when her own faith waned in her ideal that her progress was checked, and lack of faith in the Church, *i.e.*, among professors of religion, is the chief hindrance which has ever made her progress so slow throughout the generations. If the Church had kept to the narrow path of her duty ; if she had faithfully observed her covenant ; if she had kept her first enthusiasm and love ; then by this time, the Beatitudes would have been absolutely triumphant, and the kingdom of God would have become an actual historical fact. Even as it is, in spite of half-hearted faith and imperfect witness, of inconsistency and frequent failure, the ethics of Christ have won a large victory in the world, enough at least to show that the future is with Him, and that, by and by, He will surely come to His own.

Let us not allow the slowness of this progress to make us uncertain of the issue. We are too prone to

put the vast slow movement of spiritual forces to the test of our own petty measurements. Men have ceased to do this with the evolution of the physical universe ; where formerly they thought in days, they now think in millenniums, and so they recognise the vast room in time and space that Nature needs to ripen her unhasting but unresting processes. We must cease to apply the scale of the almanac to the still larger and finer evolution of the spirit. If untold millions of years were needed to bring the soul of man to birth, we must not grudge him similar scope to come to the "perfect man." So much has been done in a few thousand years towards the realisation of the kingdom of God on earth, that our hope should beat high and true as to the ultimate, far off, but certain goal towards which we are tending. Every step of progress that is being made is in the right direction, and if the pinnacles of the Holy City are only just beginning to appear above the horizon of time, it will surely come into sight at last, from base to summit.

"Red of the dawn !

Is it turning a fainter red ? So be it, but when shall we lay
The ghost of the brute that is walking, and haunting us yet and
be free ?

In a hundred, a thousand winters ? Ah ! what will our children be,
The men of a hundred thousand, a million summers away ?"

Even so, come Lord Jesus !

THE POWER OF CHRISTIAN
LIVES

By REV. J. G. GREENHOUGH, M.A.

THE POWER OF CHRISTIAN LIVES

“Ye are the salt of the earth ; ye are the light of the world.”
—MATTHEW v. 13, 14.

WHAT simple figures these are ! taken from everyday things : and yet, what majestic force there is in them. They are the universal things, and they are imperative necessities to the world. Salt savours all your food, keeps the body in health, adds medicine to the air you breathe, saves the sea from becoming a huge noisome pool, saves a hundred dead things from putrefaction. And light ! You can hardly think of life at all without that. Without light the world would be a dungeon, and the men in it all blind, if in that case there were any men at all. All things that live and grow are dependent on it. It is health-giving, joy-giving. It is the great artist that paints all pleasant pictures. It is the great magician that transforms all things. It fills the world with beauty.

Now, think what a stupendous saying. Do you tell me that this Sermon on the Mount is nothing but a

discourse about duty and morality, and that any one might approve of these sayings whatever his thought about the person who uttered them? If so, read these words again, and then humbly repent of the foolish thing you have said or thought. "Ye are the salt of the earth; ye are the light of the world." God Himself, with all His omniscience, could hardly make a loftier and more confident assertion than that. How imperial the scope and extent of His view! His thoughts swept through all the ages. He had a vision of all that would be accomplished by His name and power. Remember He was speaking to a small handful of men—men just taken in hand to train. You know what they were—small in their views as they were small in number, illiterate, steeped in prejudice, childishly superstitious, full of moral defects, unknown save in the village where they had been born. To speak of these men in those grand, ambitious terms as light-givers and regenerators to the whole world! It is laughable—at least it would be if any other lips had said the words. But in that little company He saw the womb of the future. He saw the ever-increasing host of faithful men and women, who would gather around Him as these had done. He saw His own sweetness and light carried by renewed lives innumerable, into the dark and putrid places of humanity. He saw Himself magnified and reproduced everywhere. He saw morning breaking for all the world in the lamp which He had kindled. He spoke not to those twelve

men alone. He spoke to His *own* through all generations. The words are in our ears. They speak to our hearts and consciences. If we believe in Him, they belong to us. If we love Him, they are true of us. "Ye are the salt of the earth; ye are the light of the world." Now, note this :

I.

It is not a command. It is not in the imperative mood, ordered as a duty.

It is given as a grand, positive, an indisputable fact, something that must be and cannot be otherwise. A disciple of Jesus acts as salt. He is a savour of sweetness. He is a bit of moral leaven—a diffuser of moral light. That which is in him goes out of him, and the air about feels it. The surrounding sphere of thought is coloured by it. The men with whom he comes in contact unconsciously yield to its influence. Ye *are* the light of the world, if ye have received faith and discipleship. It is not a question of may be, or ought. It is an inevitable result. The light, says Jesus, cannot be hid. It burns only in the open; it needs air. Shut it up and it goes out.

If the salt does not do its work on the surrounding material, it is not salt; it is only pretentious or

offensive rubbish waiting to be cast out and trodden under foot. I do not know how many articles of faith constitute a Christian, how much of Christ's thoughts and emotions are required to make a Christian life. I would not for the world undertake to say which of you are Christians and which are not. Some of you are Christians without knowing it, and others would possibly take the name who have no right to it. The word is so elastic that it covers all manner of creatures, like Noah's ark. It means so much that the saint sometimes is afraid to take it; and it means so little that the gilded ornaments of a voluptuous society presume to claim it. To say that all who bear the Christian name, or even all who confess the Christian creed, are salt and light, would be to provoke the sneers of the infidel and the wit of the satirist, and reduce these words of the Saviour into a grotesque mockery. But of every one whom *Christ* would call a Christian, these words are in a measure true, undeniably true. You cannot have received Christ without showing Him. You cannot honestly think His thoughts without reflecting Him. You cannot be temples of His spirit without having windows in your lives through which His spirit shines. You cannot be charmed and enthralled with His beauty without mirroring some features of it. You cannot be forgiven men without manifesting it in unusual tenderness to others. You cannot love Him and be loved by Him without giving out your joy as the rose flings out its perfume. You cannot

be melted by His suffering and dying patience without putting on forbearance and gentleness in all your intercourse with men. You cannot grasp His spiritual hopes and promises without realising some of the dignity, which will be an elevating example to others ; and you cannot walk an hour with Him in heavenly places without carrying the after effects of that communion into the world.

If His light glows in you at all, your lives will shine. The world may not know whence the light comes, but will be conscious of it. If you do not tell men that you are a Christian, they will find it out. The voice declares it. It is in the very gestures and attitudes. It begets so much of patience, and thoughtful love, and instinctive purity, and higher thought, and quiet hopefulness, and resolute courage, that it cannot be hid. Christ knew His own power, and what He always could and would do with the lives that received Him, when He said, "Ye are the salt of the earth ; ye are the light of the world."

II.

I carry the words to a wider field.

They were a prediction concerning the Church and the world, and the prediction has been fulfilled more or less in every Christian age ; and it is fulfilled

to-day, not completely, but undeniably and beautifully. It is the great fact of the modern world that Christian lives are its salt, and Christ's power embodied in Christian lives the one saving force which preserves it from corruption. When you declare that the Church is a failure you give the lie to the Master. If you do not recognise its elevating and purifying and sanctifying forces, you deny that He lives and breathes through it. People who exalt Christ's life and teaching, and constantly depreciate and slander His Church, are stabbing Him by indirect methods. Sneers flung at Christians are back-handed strokes at the Master. Beware lest you should be found guilty on this charge. We are always apologising for the Church and for our own Christian lives. It is right we should ; we who know what the ideal is are compelled to groan at the imperfection of the real. We can see better than the scornful what Christ's people ought to be and are not ; and there are times when we could weep rivers of tears over the rents in Christ's body and the stains in His garments. We know that the Church is but half awake, that some of its limbs are hardly alive from the dead, that it is encumbered by a weight of worldliness, that thousands cling on to the fringe of it who have no part in its life, and have hardly seen Christ's shadow as it passed by. We know, as the Saviour told us it would be, that it has false prophets, and wolves in sheep's clothing, and graceless hearts that assume its dress for respectability's sake, and tares amid all its

wheat, and may be in every company of disciples a Judas. We know and acknowledge all this humbly and sorrowfully.

But let not your lamentations degenerate into gross injustice. Take care that you do not fall into the darkness of pessimism or the blindness of prejudice, and lose sight of the grander and nobler side. There is no need for Christians to play the game of the unbelieving, and take the Church at the valuation which is put upon it by those who hate it. Everybody in the present day pokes satires at the Church, or empties his venom upon it if he is quite outside its thoughts and sympathies. It ought to be dead indeed not to writhe under the stings which it suffers. It is killed all the day long. There is a wild chorus of spiteful and envious and unthinking voices pronouncing it at least an absolute failure. The popular literature works much on this line, and, I suppose, finds it profitable. The favourite novel finds all its good people outside the Church. Its best people are those who believe least. Its examples of purity and heroism and self-sacrifice abound most in the agnostic circles of art and literature. It discovers immaculate saints behind the stage curtains and in the music hall, and angels in all but wings in artists' models and society drawing-rooms.

And when the popular novel notices the Church at all, it is to misrepresent it, to show its weakest features, and to portray its least attractive adherents. Christian teachers are painted as hypocrites or

narrow - minded bigots, or vulgar and ambitious egotists, and professors of religion as illiterate and coarse, and probably selfish and unlovely people.

Surely we have had enough of this sickening and slanderous stuff, this painting of black white, this depreciating and defaming of the Church, this beautifying and glorifying of what we call the world. I do not know that Church which these books paint for us with all its sleek hypocrisies and empty pretensions. It may exist ; but I think it exists chiefly in the imagination of those who would like to have it so. The Church which I know, and which I come in contact with, is still the salt of the earth, and the light of the world. It has thousands and thousands of men and women who are endeavouring, so far as erring tempted mortals can, to embody Christ's thoughts in their lives, and to make His spirit felt in all their surroundings. I do not deny that there are pure-minded, large-hearted, generous, and lovable souls not enrolled among Christ's followers, but for every one of them, I could find a hundred who owe all their goodness to the faith and inspiration of the Master. It is the men who love Him, and believe in Him—these mainly who supply all the purifying influences and saving forces which are affecting the world. They are doing more than all scientific inventions, medical skill, municipal organisations, and governmental agencies to cleanse the moral slums, to raise the fallen masses, to make life worth living for the miserable, and to create in the hard hearts of men

some touches of love for their fellow-men. Their influence is felt as a restraining hand at least, and as a savour of better things, in every society, amid the corruptions of pleasure, amid the brutal selfishnesses of voluptuous and heedless wealth, amid the dishonesties of the market, and the tricks and immoralities of politics and government. There is not a gambling club, or theatre, or gin palace, or doubtful place of any kind, which would not sink into deeper infamy if their moral power were not indirectly felt. If they do not cry in the streets, they are in evidence everywhere. Their beliefs affect the very unbelievers. They force on men's minds thoughts of God and eternal things, and a judgment to come. Sin would run riot everywhere, but for the check which they impose. Despair would creep over human society, but for the hopes which they suggest. The light in which they walk throws some scattered beams on the dark sorrows of the most unbelieving, and the faith in which they live and die whispers some little consolation to the most hardened when the grave closes on their loved ones.

No, the Church is not what it ought to be, might be, and would be, if those who love Christ were not of such double heart. But to think of what the world would be without it, is to think of the nether pit, and a hold of every foul spirit. Try to make it what Christ would have it ; but thank God also for what it is—the salt of the earth, and the light.

And now, there is little need to apply these

thoughts to the Christian work in which you are or ought to be engaged. The text applies itself. It is essentially a missionary text. The final words of the Saviour are not more the great commission of the Church than these, His earliest words. "Go ye into all the world" is but a corollary of "Ye are the light of the world." "Ye are the salt of the earth" is as all-inclusive in its scope as "I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Me." In these words He projected all missionary enterprise. Here He grasped in thought the world's salvation, and the mode in which it would be accomplished. They are words which sweep aside all limitation, and make the saving activities of His Church co-extensive with humanity. His disciples are to be the medium of a universal sweetening and illumination. There is no light for any part of the world save His own light carried by their hands, and shining forth in their lives. They are not to stop short until the glory beams on all faces. Nor will the Church stop short or shrink from this work, or become lukewarm in it until it is salt that has lost its savour. Not until His truths have become to the Church like smoking flax instead of burning coal. Not until His spirit is quenched, and the Church has become an empty candlestick with the divine light removed. Not until His name has lost all power over those who once loved Him, and the faith which vowed eternal allegiance has betrayed Him for the kisses of the world. Until then His disciples will be found on every

field carrying the salt and spreading the light, and the Church will be behind them, with its sympathies, gifts, and prayers. In this grand work, indeed, is the surest proof that He is alive for evermore, that He still breathes upon His disciples, and imparts to them the Holy Ghost, and that they have grasped the meaning and purpose of these great words, "Ye are the salt of the earth ; ye are the light of the world."

THE SALT OF THE EARTH

BY REV. A. ROWLAND, D.D., LL.B., B.A.

THE SALT OF THE EARTH

“Ye are the salt of the earth.”—MATTHEW v. 13.

OUR Lord began His Sermon on the Mount with ascriptions of blessedness. In this passage He proceeds to point out concurrent responsibilities. No one in His kingdom is to be forgetful of these. Every Christian is blessed that he may become a blessing, and the isolation of the ascetic, equally with the self-absorption of the worldling, is opposed to Christ's ideal. Indeed, men are so vitally connected by the fact of their common humanity, that the words of St Paul are strictly true—“None of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself.” For good, or for evil, every man affects those around him—purifying by his purity, or corrupting by his corruption. And in proportion as life is vivid (as it is in every true child of God), the influence of the man who has it becomes the more pervasive. Though, as our Lord suggests, he may be persecuted for righteousness' sake, slandered, scorned, and oppressed, he will still prove, up to the limit of his influence, “the salt of the earth,” preserving it from corruption, and “the light of the world,” illumining its darkness.

It is characteristic of the Sermon on the Mount, and indeed of all our Lord's teaching, that the most spiritual truths are set forth by the most simple emblems. The commonest things in nature, and the most ordinary things in use, through the wisdom of the Great Teacher, constitute the alphabet of His instruction. The "salt" which every housewife handled, the sunlight which every child could bask in, the handlamp of the Eastern house, and the bushel which measured the gleaner's corn, the pearls which an Oriental woman was proud of, and the swine driven out under the trees by the herdsman; the good tree which bore luscious fruit, and the thorns and thistles which spread far and fast in the neglected field; the sandy soil which slipped after a storm, and the rock which still stood firm though beaten by centuries of varied weather—were all employed by Jesus to make more plain and more memorable to His hearers truths which are more abiding than they all. To the mind of Him, by whom are all things, and for whom are all things, the visible world was to the invisible what the tabernacle in the wilderness had been to Moses, who saw heavenly visions on Sinai, and ever afterwards remembered Jehovah's command, "See that thou make all things according to the pattern showed to thee in the mount." "For the invisible things of Him, since the creation of the world, are clearly seen, being perceived through the things that are made."

Let us then reverently consider the verse which

lies before us, as presenting a God-ordained analogy, and not a man-invented picture.

Both salt and life are used here to describe the influence which ought to be exerted upon the world by the men whose characteristics are set forth in the preceding verses. The reference is not to their opinions, nor to their beliefs, but to themselves; for it was to the living men before Him that Jesus said, "*Ye are the salt of the earth*"—"Ye are the light of the world." In other words, we Christians, because we are Christians, are to keep the earth from corruption, and to illumine it with the heavenly light of purity, pity, peace, and love. This we shall do when we display not mere worldly excellencies, but those graces already described in the Sermon, which are distinctively Christian; for salt and light do their special work through the peculiarity which distinguishes each of them from all else. Our attention is called here to the personal influence of a genuine Christian life, which may be exercised in a sphere so obscure that it works secretly as salt, or in a sphere so public that all passers-by may see it, like a city set on a hill which cannot be hid.

It is impossible to insist too strongly, or too often, upon the witnessing power of a Christian life. It is pre-eminent above all other gifts, brilliant though they may be. We very properly thank God for all the able defences of Christian doctrine which great speakers and writers have made; we rejoice over the millions of books, and especially of Bibles, poured

forth from the press—but we must never forget that the main strength of Christ's cause does not lie in these, but in the devout men and women who are centres of holy influence, and who are doing all that in them lies to keep sweet and pure the sphere in which they live. There are mothers in busy households who sometimes half regret their old possibilities of service ; there are gentle girls in quiet homes whose loving consideration and winsome self-forgetfulness show them to be true followers of Jesus ; there are busy men who in the whirl of modern business still retain the upright mind and the loving heart, and there are obscure invalids whose patience and self-control keep out of their presence fretfulness and worldliness :—and all of these—all like these—deserve the noble encomium of Jesus—"Ye are the salt of the earth."

Let us now look a little more closely into this beautiful emblem.

The value of salt has been recognised by the civilised and the uncivilised in all ages. Pliny quotes the old Roman proverb—*Nil sole et sale utilius*. And when Jesus here describes His disciples as the salt of the earth, He implied that they were a good and indispensable element in human society.

I.

One of the special functions of salt is to preserve corruptible things from decay.

In the days of our Lord society was on the verge of putrefaction, and He knew that nothing could save it but the conserving power of goodness, manifested in Himself and in His disciples. It must be sorrowfully admitted that the influence of the Church has been by no means what it should have been, and might have been, but there is no doubt that it has to some extent checked the awful spread of natural corruption, for never since the days of the Flood has all flesh corrupted its way upon the earth.

As an ecclesiastical corporation, the Church has often failed, but there have been in all ages, even in the worst times, some whose home influence and whose obscure lives have been preserving the world from corruption, for towards that end every devout heart and every pure life constantly tends. This work of theirs does not require publicity, or any great capacity. Salt does its work silently, by simply being in contact with that which needs its conserving powers, and all that is required of it is that it should keep its own peculiar saltiness, and should remain in contact with what it preserves. These are the essential qualities of Chris-

tian usefulness. We must keep up the distinctive character of the new life, as we can only do by prayer and watchfulness, by self-discipline, and by daily fellowship with our Lord ; and if His life is in any measure lived by us, to that extent we shall be a check on wrong-doing, and a means of purifying the society in which we are.

Do not look for a new and larger sphere, but rather seek to fill your own faithfully, and amid the circumstances in which you are placed let a Christly life witness for itself. Probably you have yourself observed the effectiveness of an unmistakable religious life. All who come in contact with it in the office, or in the school, or in the home, feel its influence. One saintly lad, by the mere fact of his presence, does more to rebuke evil talk in his own sphere than all the sermons preached on the preceding Sabbath day. A little child, whose likeness to Jesus no one will deny, by her sweet innocence and gentleness abashes anything unholy, and quiets anything unruly. A meek sufferer, who with uncomplaining fortitude bravely endures the weariness and pain of each new day, is a means of grace to the whole household. The salt of the earth often lies in out-of-the-way places, and keeps sweet what the world hardly thinks about. "Have salt in yourselves, and have peace one with another."

II.

But the hearers of our Lord were all Jews.

They had been brought up under a dispensation wherein this natural product had divinely-appointed uses. Salt was one of the oldest and simplest forms of sacrifice, and in Leviticus ii. 13 we read: "And every oblation of thy meat-offering shalt thou season with salt; neither shalt thou suffer the salt of the covenant of thy God to be lacking from thy meat-offering: with all thine offerings thou shalt offer salt." To all meat-offerings, at least, salt was added, and it entered into the composition of the sacred incense. The Jews held that the purport of this enactment was that as the offerers sought to preserve their sacrifice, so were they seeking to preserve their souls. Be that as it may, all Jewish disciples of our Lord would understand that as the sacrifice was not acceptable without salt, so the world was to be made acceptable to God through their influence. They were to be the moral preservers of the race, in order that it might become an acceptable offering unto God.

Now here we touch on the fringe of a difficult, if not of an insoluble, question; namely, how far is one man blessed for the sake of another, or how far is a nation, or the world, saved by the presence of the

Church? Whatever mysteries may surround the truth thus indicated, and truth it is, Abraham's intercession for those cities of the plain which God would have delivered, had there been moral salt enough in them to preserve them from utter putrefaction, is but one evidence of what God does for the sake of the righteous. The prophets again and again hint at this fact, and the New Testament exemplifies it. For example, when Euroclydon was raging, the angel of God stood by Paul, in the night, saying: "Lo! God hath given thee all them that sail with thee."

This principle of Mediatorship is displayed in its most glorious and far-reaching sphere in the work of Jesus Christ, who died for us; who lives for us; through whom this world is spared and every sinner has the offer of free and full salvation. This is no theological figment. It is a great truth which is imbedded in the whole history of the race. All of us have received blessings apart from our own desert. That you and I are where we are, and what we are, to-day, is not the result of our choice, or of our merit. The moral heritage which helps or hinders us through life, with inborn tendencies and peculiarities; our protection from evil in the home of our childhood; the education we received, and the associations which from the first encircled us; the prayers and tears, the warnings and pleadings of parentage, and of friendship: all these, and much besides, became ours, not because of what *we* were, but because of what others were, and because of what God meant us to be. We

praise Him for the moral salt which by His blessing has done much to preserve us from corruption.

Now this influence we, in our turn, are to extend, and our text reminds us that we shall do good only in proportion as we are good. No one, for example, can be a good minister unless he is a good man. For we must not overlook the dire possibility suggested in the words which follow: "But if the salt have lost its savour, wherewith shall it be salted? It is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out and trodden under foot of men." This is a solemn warning. It implies that the salt of the earth, instead of healing corruption, may actually itself become corrupted by contact with it. This is true in morals, however it may be disputed in physics. Some who have frequented places of doubtful reputation, where the lust of the eye and the lust of the flesh have been stimulated, and who at first justified themselves by saying these places will never be improved till Christians go to them, have not only failed in their professed aim, but have sometimes themselves forsaken the faith, and wandered into the paths of sin.

Church after Church has fallen from its ancient purity, with equal facility and fatality, till, as with the Churches of Asia, the salt which has lost its savour has been cast out by God and by man. If salt became corrupt it would not be possible to make it salt again, and having once lost its savour it would neither be good for the land, nor yet for the dunghill; it could neither fertilise nor purify; and as a troublesome,

harmful thing, men would cast it into the roadway, where it could not do much harm, there to be trodden under foot of men.

History tells us of the fulfilment of this in the once chosen people of God. Because the Jews became corrupt they were swept away by the besom of Roman power, and have been trodden under the feet of men for centuries. To the same cause we must attribute the downfall of the Eastern and African Churches, and the loss of power on the part of Rome, in Luther's time. Now Protestant Churches are on their trial, that they may prove whether they can conquer the world's scepticism by their simple faith, whether they can check the world's impurity by their inherent holiness, and whether they can compose men's enmities by their brotherly love. Only as Christ is again formed in His Church will there be "hope of glory," whether for it or for the world. "And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as He is pure." Now God Himself seeks to purge the Church, by taking His people in hand one by one, and the very fierceness of their trials proves sometimes the means of purging. When salt is purified by evaporation, the fiercer the heat the finer the result. If the fire be gentle, we only get a coarse product called bay-salt; if the temperature be raised a little, the product is less coarse, and becomes fit for curing provisions; but if the fire be fierce, and the brine raised almost to boiling-point, evaporation is rapid, and the crystals become small, till at last we

obtain the finest and purest salt. Those who, like Paul, have passed through the fiercest fire of affliction, are they who do most to preserve the world from corruption, and prepare it as an oblation to God. It is of them above all others that the words are true : "Ye are the salt of the earth."

Note.—In my contributions to this volume I wish to acknowledge my indebtedness to the Expositor, whose helpfulness to Bible students is invaluable.

THE PRE-EMINENCE OF CHRISTIAN
DISCIPLESHIP

By REV. THOMAS G. SELBY

THE PRE-EMINENCE OF CHRISTIAN DISCIPLESHIP

"A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid."—MATTHEW v. 14.

AS Jesus sat on the mountain, surrounded by the twelve and an eager multitude, the small mountain-city of Safed confronted Him, a place which centuries before may have been one of the last strongholds of the Canaanites. Like an eagle surveying the world from its eyrie, this primitive citadel crowned one of the two peaks which closed in the vista stretching itself before the Great Teacher. It has been suggested that whilst uttering these words Jesus lifted His eyes towards this fastness which dominated the horizon. Such a gesture suits the genius of the preacher, and befits the geographical framework in which the discourse is set.

Some cities are built in the folds of foot-hills where plain and mountain meet; some are embosomed in the depths of half-cleared forests; some have been

founded in the far-off desert, round the water-springs of an oasis ; whilst others have been hidden like the lair of the hunted beast in the tangle and undergrowth of the jungle. Perhaps it is not till the traveller is at their very gates that he finds out human habitations are at hand. He plunges through a ravine into the streets of the city as the darkness falls and the lights in the windows and doorways could not be seen many yards away. But other towns and cities are planted on conspicuous heights, and their roofs, spires, and battlements can be seen from afar, silhouetted against the cloudless blue. Such cities have probably grown from a primitive castle, fortress, or monastery. Hill-cities are more common in other lands than our own. Lincoln and Durham are but partial representatives of the type. Perhaps the rigours of a northern climate drove our forefathers to found their habitations in valleys and on sheltered slopes. Outstanding cities are frequent in the lands of warm sunshine. They abound in Rhenish Germany, and may be seen in many parts of France. Avranches, Poitiers, Angoulême, Coutances, Mount St Michel, and Chartres stamp themselves indelibly upon the memories of those who visit them. The spires of these picturesque places glitter from afar, and a long climb is needed before the traveller finds himself in the quaint, mediæval streets, the open-air markets, and the cathedral squares. They are lordly, unabashed, commanding—expressions of the old world chivalry and prowess ; extreme contrasts to the

jungle and forest cities which shrink from the notice of the world.

And such, we are told, must be the attitude of discipleship. Under no circumstances must it be shy, timid, inconspicuous, reluctant to assert and to avow itself. If it is to captivate the world's imagination, it is bound to be luminous, outstanding, easy to identify, moulded in large and impressive outlines. And its prominence must not be that which is sometimes obtained by windy and self-advertising braggadocio, but solidly based. Conspicuousness should not be confounded with the megalomania, often apparent in social, commercial, and international life, which sometimes, alas, breaks out in the Churches. There are forms of piety which lend themselves to momentary inflation like a stock or share; and inflation is usually followed by disappearance. The dreamy and unsubstantial cities of the mirage are rich in colour, and imposing in outline, but do not endure. Jesus insists upon a discipleship that is conspicuous, but conspicuous through its own strong, valid, and well-based qualities; and that is not genuine discipleship which fails to correspond with this impressive similitude.

I.

Our Lord has just been speaking of a new kind of discipleship in which every duty is identical with privilege, and by the similitude of our text does He not mean to imply that in its manifest blessedness the life of His followers must tower high above the common life?

In asking men to be good after a new pattern of perfection, He does not leave them to the satisfactions of normal human experience only.

Those who assume that inducements to well-doing are inherent in abstract virtue itself, and maintain that adventitious persuasives savour of an appeal to more or less refined forms of selfishness, often admit in their practical methods a need of playing upon yet lower interests. To attempt an uplifting of the average daily temper and conduct without introducing a new supply of motive into human life is to enlarge the area of insincerity and boastful profession. Jesus Christ would have been superfluous if He could bring no reinforcement to the ethical instinct of the race. A mission which does nothing more than add the postscript of the Golden Rule to those admirable systems of morals elaborated by the master-spirits of the past must obviously be stamped with failure from the beginning. The inadequacy of preceding ethical

systems lay not so much in their unfitness to conceive and construct high standards of duty as in their inability to minister inspiration and strength for the attainment of those standards. Through weary centuries the renowned lawgivers of the race had deafened the mute and fainting millions with the watchword "Onward"; but offered no mystic cordial, no invigorating manna, no finer atmosphere with which to revive the flagging march of the race towards spiritual perfection.

In the eight Beatitudes, which ring in with their melodious chimes the high precepts of this incomparable sermon, Jesus affirms that divine favour, in manifold forms, already rests upon those in whom the traits of discipleship appear. The blessings of the kingdom are not prizes kept in reserve at the goal which is reached through the consummated progress of a lifetime, but anticipate achievement and are experienced in the initiatory stages of the spiritual history. The Preacher intimates that for all who are poor in spirit He holds in trust the title-deeds of the celestial inheritance. He comes as a herald and minister of comfort to those who mourn. Strength and inward satisfaction are at hand for all who hunger and thirst after righteousness. Infinite forgiving mercy already stretches out its arms towards those who are pitiful and kind. It is true that discipleship has its later steps; and it may be that the high distinctions awaiting the pure-hearted, the peace-makers, and the persecuted lie in more or less distant horizons; but

not a few of the blessings which Christ proclaims are within the experimental possibilities of the hour. The Speaker pledges His word for the swift and sure communication of these benefits and privileges—nay, He Himself is King and Mediator of the New Covenant, and by His own sovereign act attaches divine favour and inward contentment to the tempers and laws of conduct He enjoins. To discipleship in all its aspects He joins present, conscious, soul-
uplifting gladness and honour, of which the earlier saints had but a meagre foretaste. We can almost imagine that this section of the discourse floats back upon the recollection of St Peter when, in his first epistle, he asserts that the pre-eminent royalty and priestliness of the believer's distinction rests in the last analysis upon a distinction of inner experience: "which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy." His climax is like a lingering echo of the fifth Beatitude.

We speak of privileged classes, and it is easy to recognise those who belong to them, the men and women who enjoy the luxuries of wealth and are addressed by titles of honour—the classes refined by art, music, and culture. They stand out from the grey, weary multitude, and live in shining little kingdoms of their own. The discipleship which has become possessed of a great birthright of privilege is equally easy to identify; it rises above that mean of attainment which is not far from failure. If we are Christ's followers, in spite of crosses and mis-

fortunes, we are happier, stronger, more contented, more courageous of temper than our Christless neighbours. Strong foundations of comfort and blessedness sustain our souls, our cup flows over with rare bounty.

Has our discipleship this note of blessedness which answers to Christ's description? Is there in our disposition a serenity and a blithesome, spiritual healthiness, a sense of attainment, and munificent possession, distinguishing us from those who do not follow Christ, as obviously as the vernal zones of the earth are separated from its zones of desolation? Does our religion save us from the current pessimism and the moaning querulousness of the day, and make us into a well-marked class apart? On what plane do we live?

The Dead Sea is more than twelve hundred feet below the level of the Mediterranean, and to camp there for a night is to have an uneasy sense of lowered vitality. The climate is sultry and malarious, fever haunts every crevice of the hills, and it is scarcely possible for the strong man to exult in his strength. The Philistines might have tamed Samson by sending him to sojourn there. Many of our fellow-men, alas! dwell in depths not unlike that depressed strip of the earth, fathoms below the level of a bracing, salubrious, gay-hearted naturalism. They are sensitive, and perhaps have imagination; but its wings only carry them down into the sultriness and maddening depression of the horrible pit.

And altruism divorced from faith only aggravates the distemper. Such people are the martyrs of bare nerves touched with red-hot needles, writhing under their own grievances, and seeing in those grievances multiplied reflections of a race made in vain. Men, who have often become morbid altruists through personal misfortune, seethe in bitterness, discontent, unhealing sensibility, paralysing despairs, and from such pitiful conditions death seems the only door of hope and salvation. Of course you have nothing in common with these unhappy and intractable beings who have been self-hypnotised by brooding over the problem of pain. The disciple of Jesus is on a higher altitude and in a wind-stirred atmosphere which keeps the sunshine from turning into flames of hell; and even when things are at the darkest he always has a saving sense of duty to be done. But bring yourself into comparison with the prosperous, law-abiding, virtuous people who are presumably outside Christ, the people who have noble standards of citizenship, yet who make the pursuit of refined pleasure the chief aim of life; do you surpass such in steadfast, inward blessedness? Do your neighbours incline to Christ because of the liberty, privilege, and conscious joyfulness which faith has brought to you? Do they come to you instead of going down into the laughing crowd, and say, "Teach me the secret?" Discipleship is eminent in its privilege as the city founded on the heights which often enjoys the

zephyr and the sunshine when the valley is choked with gloom.

This essential feature of discipleship, it is to be feared, is not always so conspicuous as Christ demands. After every Beatitude we put a note of interrogation, faintly pencilled it may be, yet ominous. The doubt steals upon us, like a pale apparition, that the Master at whose feet we have placed ourselves may after all be half-phantom and half-history, or, at the best, a unique example of posthumous influence. The inward visitations which come to enhearten us may be born of remote atmospheric conditions, psychological ferments which defy analysis, rather than the fruit of Christ's living fellowship with our souls. When mystic satisfactions proffer themselves to us we regard them with reserve, and so tend to make them evanescent. What poor travesties we are of the "city set on a hill!" Jesus does not want your discipleship unless it will prove a beatific relationship, making you excel the votaries of Confucius, Buddha, Mahomet, and Auguste Comte, in peace, courage, and sure victory. Affiliation with Christ's school means not only that you are a student of His teaching, but that you are a personal follower, of His spiritual kindred, feeling the solace and the inspiration of His friendship, and sharing His personal satisfactions. You are not one in a promiscuous world-crowd of searchers after truth, but a discoverer whose foundations are on the loftiest heights. "We have found Him of whom Moses in

the law and the prophets did write. Is not this the Christ?"

Do we not sometimes disguise the priceless Beatitudes of discipleship by the eagerness with which we clutch at the gaieties of the passing moment? If a man were to join a crowd of street arabs and scramble for the pennies thrown into their midst on a fête day, you would be incredulous if he were pointed out as a Park Lane millionaire; Cræsus himself would belie his position by such an act. And no one will believe you to be a joint-heir of Jesus Christ, and to have the earnest of coming glory in your heart, if you pursue with delirious eagerness the baubles of Vanity Fair; nor will you be credited with believing in this heirship yourself. The inward blessedness of which you are the possessor must be patent to others: "A city set on an hill cannot be hid."

II.

This similitude, of course, implies the duty of making known to the world the honour and blessedness realised by those who are in the Messianic fellowship.

In other words, we must confess Christ in bold and unmistakable accents. The ideal city here pictured is a testimony written in stone, telling of strength which has entrenched itself on the heights, of homes whose peace no assailant can disturb, of safe resting-

places for little children. It expresses courage, fortitude, impregnability ; and such is discipleship when we make it as bold, as frank, as fearless as the Lord desires.

“ I will lay thy stones with fair colours, and lay thy foundations with sapphires.” A stronghold built of jewels must not be hidden away in an obscure fissure of the mountains, or built like Palmyra in the far-off wilderness, or crouch in some such lonesome ravine as that where the old prophet was concealed. It must be reared on the most commanding site we can find. If God is preparing to put wonderful things into the structure of your experience and character, it is fitting your discipleship should be openly confessed. Think of yourself as one of Christ’s cities of refuge to which those who are hunted and nigh unto death may come ; and if you thus view the subject you will make no secret of your religion. The Master asks your frank avowal and testimony. In the days when the Abbey Church of Hexham was a sanctuary, every finger-post in the surrounding country pointed to it ; and the finger-posts were scarcely less important than the sanctuary itself. The Lover and the Redeemer of human souls knows how significant is your witness, and demands it.

Shy and retiring Christians of estimable character sometimes allow themselves to be kept back from acknowledging the grace they have received. In their judgment, the city should be built in an obscure dell away from the busy haunts of men.

Religious experience must be kept as a secret of inviolable privacy. True disciples ought to have humble views of themselves and their attainments. But it is possible to have self-deprecating views whilst we magnify the riches of the grace which daily works within us. If you are in danger of a hollow profession, hide your face in shame by all means ; but do not assume an unflinching witness and deep self-abasement conflict with each other. If you can say with St Peter, "Thou knowest that I love thee," strengthen others by your confession. St Paul accounted himself "less than the least of all saints" ; but he told the world more of the inwardness of his spiritual autobiography than any man of his time, and this made his influence so commanding. Where would the human race have been to-day but for the confession of the first brave disciples who had been Christ's companions, and had learned at His feet ? Bold outspokenness was the sign that they had been with Jesus. And our confession may be as important for the after-generations as the confession of those preceding us is for us. Jesus had secret disciples ; but they had to become open at last, and I do not suppose that they learned the greatness of their evangelical inheritance till they dared to come into the noonday. Do not be afraid of reproach. There are those in the world ever ready to hurl scorn at the city of God, and its roll of freemen ; but it will be as harmless as the stone flung from the sling of the herd-boy in the valley at the loftiest peak of the Alps.

Jesus Christ gave His life-blood to found a Church which should stand legible in all its lines before the vision of the world. "A city which is set on an hill cannot be hid."

III.

This similitude implies that Jesus looked for higher standards of character in His disciples than could be found in sections of society not yet touched by His influence.

It was scarcely fitting that His Church should be redeemed by His own sacred blood and enriched with all spiritual blessing through union with His own life, unless its members could reach nobler altitudes of moral and spiritual greatness than their contemporaries. We are in danger of forgetting what is due from us to the Lord who died to reproduce His character in us; and our principles are moulded, to some extent, by the course of this world rather than by the forces of a Cross, which asserts His sovereignty over us. Too often we accept as a sufficient rule of life social usages hall-marked by the community in which we live, or customs approved by the trade in which we are engaged. But the lines laid down by the wont and use of a trade within which buying and selling may be carried on, must not be looked upon as the final limits of Christian obligation. There

ought always to be a note of differentiation between the man who has been privileged with the friendship of Jesus and the man who does not know this secret blessedness and inspiration. And differentiation does not mean eccentricity, which is often a clumsy, conceited travesty of differentiation. Unless you excel your most estimable neighbour who lacks faith in Christ, it is difficult to see how you are profiting by those inward stores of peace, hope, courage, holy motive, assured salvation with which you have been endowed. If you are not marked by a finer restraint under provocation, a higher temper of sacrifice in presence of the world's needs, a more magnanimous attitude towards every question demanding your thought than the man whose obligations to Jesus Christ are indirect and unconscious, you discredit those mystic communications of grace and sympathy which have been made to your soul. Upon you rests a responsibility for demonstrating that grace is more than nature, the Cross more potent to mould character than the maxims of law-abiding neighbours, and that the influence of Christ's living sovereignty in the heart transforms more nobly than the healthiest public opinion generated by the secular experiences of the past. It is for you to show that the ethical product of heredity, wise training, pure and refining associations joined to the power of Jesus Christ, has nobler qualities in it than the product of those forces divorced from His power.

It is said that the dark spots in the sun are

dazzling when compared with the most brilliant electric light. And the crude, blemished, and ungainly disciple of Jesus, if his allegiance is real and not counterfeit, is better than the most honourable man of the world. The future will vindicate his superiority. In spite of early meanness and avarice, Jacob in due time leaves Esau behind in the pathway of moral progress, although Esau may show up better at the start. If we are in fellowship with the Lord, we ought to be as easy to identify as were the first disciples. Men should know at once by our speech, and the laws which regulate our intercourse with them, that we belong to Christ, just as readily as the prince who comes through the palace gates may be distinguished from the poor derelict who shambles out of a workhouse.

And what applies to the individual disciple applies still more impressively to the communities which bear Christ's name. When we pass through the streets of a city, we ought to know at a glance whether it is administered by Christian men, or by men whose religion begins and ends with attending church on Mayor's Sunday. If we open a blue-book we ought to know by the trend of the policy advocated which side is Christian and which is not. If a history of our own times were written up to the hour, and the name of every statesman suppressed, we ought to know from the measures passed, the wars undertaken, and the taxes put on or taken off, the measure of Christian leaven in the successive

cabinets. The holy city of God is built on a mountain great and high; and the city founded on lower levels, however gigantic its measurements and imposing its outlines, is a Babylon that shall be overthrown. A State may endow and establish fifty Churches, and clericalise every school in the land, yet it is in no sense Christian, unless its policy is one that the great Teacher of the Galilean hillside would approve without a qualification.

The Churches, it must be confessed, too often disappoint the high expectations raised by Jesus Christ. They ought to be nobler through their collective strength than their separate members, but it is not often they are so. They are weakened by financial expediency and by political opportunism, by a dread of divisions which, after all, are by no means of such grave consequences as the compromise with evil. The greatest preacher of the Episcopal Church of America, Phillips Brooks, felt it, and wrote with shame and indignation of the position of his Church in reference to the subject of negro slavery: "Year after year the Church stood back while they who fought the battle went out from her; and the whole movement against slavery became not only unchurchly but openly infidel, disowning all interest in every presentation of that Christianity of whose spirit and operation it was nevertheless of itself the legitimate result."

Writing again upon the same subject, 4th June 1864, he says, "I have been to Pittsburg and am home

again. Our Convention was a shameful failure. We asked that body of Christian ministers and laymen to say that treason was wicked, and slavery a sin. They declined, and substituted some feeble platitudes done up in feeble rhetoric, which meant nothing, and said it. I am ashamed of my Church. Never mind, the salvation of the country does not depend upon the Episcopal Church, and glad as I should have been to see her as a body on the right side now, she will have to come there by-and-by, when it will be no honour to herself. Oh, how I hate this miserable conservatism!"

And the same thing occurs again and again. The Church very often does not put itself on the right side till the victory is three parts won. It does not venture to go so far as a recent congress of Belgian socialists in discouraging the use of alcohol. It has not the grip upon the problem of our national poverty that the Labour Unions have. It dreads the displeasure of millionaires and time-serving politicians, and hums and haws its protest against Belgian atrocities in the Congo, the oppression of the Christian populations in the Balkans and in Armenia, and the decimating liquor and opium trades with native races. The Church has sometimes forsaken its high vantage-ground as "a city set on a hill," and has left pre-eminence to the non-Christian humanitarian.

But it is possible to argue that the difference between the disciple and the man of the world is minimised if not abolished by the moral and social progress of the race. We are all Christians nowadays,

or at least more or less pronounced adherents of the prophet of Nazareth. The gap eighteen centuries ago between a follower of Jesus and a Pharisee, who could not enter into the kingdom of heaven, was much wider than that between a church member and an average citizen at the present time. The world has improved, and throughout Christendom at least the difference between the two is not startling. We speak with pride and satisfaction of our advancement. A high standard of honour and integrity is necessary to respectability; the successful business man must maintain unsullied the traditions of his firm, for the unscrupulous adventurer who disturbs the course of legitimate trade soon founders. Customs are less coarse and degrading than they once were. If some of our amusements are silly, this is perhaps the worst that can be said about them; they are less brutalising than those of the ancient world. The penalties of the law are no longer barbarous and unequal, and in some cases our prisoners are treated as well or even better than our paupers. If civilisation has brought with it grim and gloomy drawbacks, they are for the most part inadvertent, and not a little is attempted to ameliorate the suffering that exists in our midst. The genius of our politics is pitiful towards all classes. We expect to see in each other the cardinal moralities upon which Christian civilisation rests, although the ecclesiastic can no longer bring his strong hand down upon us, and theoretically the Church uses no weapon but that of moral suasion. There is not a little

practical Christianity outside the Church—so much so, in fact, that the Christian disciple seems to belong to a dying aristocracy of ethic, and can no longer be the outstanding figure Jesus Christ pictured in His graphic similitude. A great levelling process is going on, and the distinction of discipleship is fast disappearing from view, like the ancient hills once enclosed by the walls of Jerusalem.

But is not the obligation to reach a proportionately higher excellence still binding upon those who call themselves by Christ's name? The disciple possesses a pattern, a mystic inspiration, an ennobling fellowship which others lack, and his surpassing privilege must illustrate itself in transcendent excellence. In some parts of the world a slow uplifting of the continent has been going on for centuries. But where the coast rises, the mountain ranges that border it are raised likewise. The hills which carry cities upon their pinnacles participate in the same movement as the lowlands and the belts of intermediate plain. If heredity, training, the stimulations of social environment, the calls of a wonderful century, have done so much for us in common with our neighbours, discipleship to Jesus should be a factor carrying us still further on the upward pathway, and enabling us to outshine the man for whom nature has done its uttermost, and on whom civilisation has lavished its best humanising ministries. Unless it is so, the throne of Jesus Christ over human destiny is proportionately lowered, and civilisations and

governments have appropriated His indirect influence, and superseded his name and personal power. In a society whose codes have become helpful to virtue and righteousness, the disciple of Jesus ought still to be a figure of right royal impressiveness. If the Lord Himself were to come back to this world of ours we should identify Him without nimbus upon His brow, sceptre in His grasp, or transfiguration radiance upon His face. We should know Him even if a social millennium had already dawned, and the towns and cities of our land, organised upon altruistic ideals, were filled with men and women of peace and goodwill. He would be distinguished by specific moral attributes which can be described only by His own name. And Christ-likeness, even if our best social and political dreams are realised, will be a thing apart to the end of the ages; for Jesus Christ only has the art of creating Christ-likeness. His personal influence upon the disciple adds a quality which will tell its own tale. "A city set on an hill cannot be hid."

I should not like to discourage discipleship in its less perfect stages, or disparage Christian Churches in which the struggle is going on between what is best and what is only second-best. The destiny of all discipleship, individual or collective, which is to be conspicuous, is involved in its earliest processes. We must beware of depreciating faint degrees of faith and love which may perhaps be described as intermittently legible, like an illuminated advertisement, the

spelling of which halts because there is something amiss with the machinery. When the man who has a long disobedient past against him receives Christ as his Saviour and King, he at once gains an advantage over the neighbour who has been helped by virtuous surroundings, but is unhelped by evangelical faith. And the advantage will soon begin to show itself. A minute improvement in the processes of an important industry may revolutionise the economic conditions of a continent, and bring startling gains to the manufacturer who adopts it. In the struggle for life some trifling gain in structure has enabled a plant or an animal to dominate half the globe ; yet no one could foretell the issue destined to arise from the modification. In all animal life the earlier paths of development are parallel, and it is only after years that the differentiations arise which mark off the senior wrangler from the crétin. Hair-breadth oscillations come to mean enormous issues. And so Jacob and Esau, John the son of Zebedee and Caiaphas the high priest, Cornelius and King Agrippa, may develop on parallel lines for years, but differentiations come at last, and have a stupendous significance. If your present experiences and attainments leave you but slenderly separated from your well-conducted neighbour who does not heed Jesus Christ, cling to the infinitesimal divergence, for as your discipleship expands and defines itself it will mean much in the present life, and still more in the life to come. But keep the goal before you from the outset.

Jesus intends your alliance with Himself to be as clearly defined, as clean cut against the sky-line, as conspicuous an object to beholders, as the city set on a hill.

Are we thus pre-eminent? If not, our discipleship is defective and unformulated, disesteemed and forgotten, vitiated by timidity, selfishness, and recurrent moods of unbelief. Go back to the beginning. Jesus means discipleship to carry with it privilege, high serenity, blessed and exhaustless consolations, and that from the first step. He is Himself the sponsor for His own Beatitudes. He is enthroned in the new kingdom to vindicate the rights of His followers. Is your soul filled with the favour He has proclaimed? Your inward experience must be legible, defined, outstanding. When this is so, confess it. If you have springs of inward satisfaction your neighbours will be eager to learn the secret. The confession that issues from a conscious experience of blessing and is sustained by a devoted life will always be grateful to seekers after truth. It may be that our spiritual riches have wasted through neglect. If we imprison divine secrets within us they will lose their sky-notes. And let all the life be manifestly conformed to Christ's pattern and teaching. Nature, home-training, the forces of social progress, the gracious affections of family life may make men truthful, honest, wholesome in speech, and clean in act; but Jesus Christ alone can make Christ-like men upon whom the world will never cease to look with

that grateful and fervent homage which is the earnest of imitation.

Oh that in our day and generation the dream of Jesus may be fulfilled, so that the world can look up to a Church of lofty ideals and no less lofty attainments, as the Athenian wayfarer turns his eyes upon the symmetries of the temples that crown the Acropolis.

SHOWING THE LIGHT

BY REV. J. G. GREENHOUGH, M.A.



SHOWING THE LIGHT

“Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.”—MATTHEW v. 16.

THE Sermon on the Mount is often praised by those who have little interest in the Church, and no belief in its doctrines. They say that they do not understand religious questions, and the things of faith and the spiritual life, and the matters which are commonly discussed in the pulpit, but the Sermon on the Mount is a bit of plain, direct talk about life and conduct—a set of simple moral rules, which a man can appreciate and act upon, whether he believes anything more or not. You have heard many a man say, “The Sermon on the Mount is enough for me.” But when people talk in that way, you may be sure that they have either never read it through or never seriously thought about it. Is it nothing but morality? a treatise on human relationship and the obligations of man to man? Is it not rather, from first to last, an exposition of the divine life in man? a life which has its beginning and end in God? It is the language

of one whose eyes and heart are uniformly directed heavenward, and who weaves into nearly every sentence some reference to the unseen Father. It is literally steeped in highest religious thought and deepest spiritual feeling. "Be ye perfect, as your Father in heaven is perfect." Do you call that morality? What does morality know about God-likeness? and all its touching words about prayer, and trust, and submission to the divine will, and the forgiveness of sins? There is something infinitely beyond morality in all that. It is not the description of a life that is ordered in a right way towards its fellow-men, but rather of a life that is ever looking God-ward, and getting strength and inspiration for its earthly duties from the one great source of spiritual power. It sounds almost absurd for a man to say, "The Sermon on the Mount is enough for me." I should think it is. Lay up in your hearts and minds all that is directly taught here, and all that comes from it by inevitable conclusion, and there is very little more in the Christian system that you will need to learn, very little more that the Epistles and Gospels can add to the fulness of your creed.

Think how these oft-quoted words, which I have read to you, introduce us to some of the most profound spiritual mysteries. "Let your light so shine." The Epistles talk a great deal about regeneration, about the new birth, about the spiritual life which comes from above, and recreates a man, making him a shrine of hallowed feeling and desire, a temple of

sanctities—purging him from his old sins, and filling him with divine sweetness and light. That doctrine of regeneration and spiritual renewal belongs to the highest region of Christian thought. It is as far above morality as heaven is above the earth. Yet is it not all wrapped up in these words of Jesus? “Ye are the salt of the earth; ye are the light of the world.” What does He mean by describing in such exalted terms the rude and ignorant band of disciples who composed His little Church? How could these men, who were so much like the rest of the world in their passions and desires, act upon it like sweetening and purifying salt? How could minds so full of prejudice and darkness serve as lamps to guide their fellow-men through the gloom? What is it but a distinct promise of regeneration, of renewal from above, of mystical union with Him who was the world’s perfect sweetness and light? They were to be themselves first recreated, filled with divine love, purity, and power, their whole nature made radiant with spiritual beauty and glory, and then they were to give forth beams of illumination, streams of sweetness for the lightening and the healing of the world. That is not morality. It is the grandest of spiritual truths. It is the washing of regeneration, and the renewing of the Holy Ghost.

How beautiful is this thought of the Christian life—that by its own innermost nature, by a sort of inevitable necessity, it is to give light to all around. “Ye are the light of the world.” The illumination

which has fallen from heaven on you, and in which you walk and rejoice, makes you luminous. The soul which has received divine light—the soul which has opened itself to the revelation of divine truth and love, and fatherhood—becomes by that very fact a radiator and distributor of heaven's beauty and glory. When God gives Himself to you, He gives you to all. There is not a belief, or truth, or promise, in which the Christian heart rejoices, that does not help to make the whole life glow, like the windows of a richly-illuminated palace, on all who pass by in the darkness outside. Every bit of God within a man testifies of God to others. Christ says, "Let your light shine"—not strive to make it shine. It will shine of itself, by its own inherent nature, if you will only not hide it. The Saviour was instructing His disciples that their place was in the world—that they were not to nurse their religious life in solitude and retirement. If they were to do that, then indeed it would be putting out the light. A candle placed under a bushel gives no light to the house, and frequently it ceases to be a light in itself, for the air in its little enclosure is soon consumed. In burning for itself, it speedily burns itself out. But set it in the open. It will burn on, and shine, without any effort to do so. So the Christian life has nothing to do but show itself in the world. It will shine of itself—never does it cease to witness for God until all that is of God is extinguished in itself.

It used to be said that Christians were men who

selfishly sought their own salvation—who fed themselves on sweet promises of future joy, and did not trouble themselves with thoughts of what might happen to the world around them. None but cynics say that now: none but people who are coarsely ignorant of what the Christian life means say that now. It is indeed a contradiction in terms. It arises from a total misunderstanding of what salvation means. Salvation is the filling of the heart and life with the large love, pity, sympathy, and goodness of God—a flushing of the whole nature with sweet, generous, grateful thoughts; a lifting up of the soul out of selfishness and individual desires, into a realm of lovely tenderness, inspired gratitude, and kindly thoughts of all. How can a man selfishly seek his own salvation? Seeking salvation is simply seeking to fill yourselves with sweetness and light, which all who are about you shall taste and see. A saved man is a man whose whole nature has been illumined in such a way that saving light radiates from him wherever he goes. How is it possible to have light without showing it? Can a man know that God has loved him—poor, frail, fickle creature as he is—loved him with a dear and everlasting love, without having his heart moved with a strange, deep tenderness towards all men? Is it possible for you to believe in the divine forgiveness of your sins, in the infinite mercy which covers over and casts into the sea your manifold transgressions, without having your hearts softened and made wonderfully relenting and pitiful

towards all who have done you any wrong? Can you think of the great promises which are your portion; the hopes which make your present so restful, and your future so glorious, without a feeling of gladness, which is proof against all trials and discomforts, and which manifests itself everywhere, witnessing to a feverish and restless world that you have found the secret of joy and peace?

If the light is in you, it must appear. If I find a religious man concerned about nothing but his own salvation, I feel that he is almost as far from the kingdom of God as one who has never heard of it. If I find a Christian man rancorous, resentful, unforgiving, cherishing and nursing his little wrongs and grudges, I say at once his religion is all creed and profession, and not a real change of heart; and if men and women are perpetually complaining, murmuring, grumbling, looking on the dark side of things, fretting and groaning over losses and bodily ailments, and forgetful of all the silver and golden sides of God's dealings with them, I know that the light has never been kindled in them, or, if once kindled, that it has gone out.

"Let your light shine." If it is real light, it will shine. It will make everybody about you know that there is something in your lives which is very beautiful, and which they have not got. We ought to know whether the man whom we casually meet in a railway compartment; and the strange person with whom we converse in a drawing-room; and the man

with whom we have our business dealings ; and the invalid whom we meet in the hospital ; we ought to know at once, by the tone of their conversation, by the very atmosphere which they seem to carry about with them, whether they are Christians or not. I am presumptuous enough to think that I do recognise them at once, not because they are forward in telling me that they are Christians, but because their simplest gestures and actions, and the very tone of voice, speak of courtesies, and tenderness, and care for others' feelings, and a certain gladness and joyous contentment which overspread their features like sunlight. It is a lovely and praiseworthy thing for a man to be for ever striving to do good ; to be busy-ing himself, and perhaps distracting himself, with all sorts of philanthropic efforts which go against the grain, which he has to whip himself to perform, which he does not very much like, but which, he thinks, will secure for him first, the favour of men, and then the reward of God ; yes, that is lovely. Any man who is trying to do good in this weary, wicked world, is to be commended, whatever his motives and reasons are. But fairer and lovelier, by far, is the life of the man who, simply because he feels the love, and compassion, and sweetness of God in his own heart, lives a life of gladness, and service, and brotherly help, because he cannot do otherwise.

Christ says nothing here about doing good works. He says, " Let your light shine." Let what is within you just come out. Be what God's truth and light

have made you, and then there follows this apparently inconsequential conclusion, that they may see your good works—good works will follow of necessity, where the heart is lighted and purified, and made glad in the love and joy of God. A preacher has no need to arouse his people by stimulating and energetic calls to saving action. Let him tell them of the way in which God has loved them; let him fill their hearts with the gladness of never-failing promises; let him endeavour to bring them into true and real touch with God, and make them partakers of the divine nature and thoughts, and then good works will follow, just as the light spreads over the earth when the sun arises. And then there will be no ambitious and selfish attempts to do good for the sake of shining.

“Do not your alms before men, to be seen of them. Do not pray at the corners of the streets.”

A Christian man does good, because he cannot help it. He is so full of the goodness and mercy of God that he wants to make that burning, all-absorbing thought of the heart manifest everywhere.

Really the whole Gospel is here. Be Christians, and then you cannot help spreading Christianity. Believe in God's love, and that will make you love everybody. Let God kindle the light of His truth and promises in your hearts, and whether you sit at home, or walk abroad; whether you preach as I do now, or never utter a word in your modest diffidence; you will be always proving to the world, by your

gentleness, gladness, hopefulness, purity, by the very expression of your face, that Christ has made of you temples of His presence; that your whole lives are witnessing of the Heavenly Father, whose presence you hope to enjoy for ever.

THE LAW'S FULFILMENT

BY REV. W. B. SELBIE, M.A.

THE LAW'S FULFILMENT

“Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets : I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil,” etc.—MATTHEW v. 17-20.

IF the Sermon on the Mount is to be regarded as a Manifesto of the Kingdom of God, then these words have a natural place in it. Every new teacher in the world has, so to speak, to find his own footing, and to relate himself to those who have gone before. Not even the greatest of the prophets is altogether a portent, absolutely original, and isolated from the history of the past and the life of his time. If a man would influence the age in which he lives he must be more or less a child of that age, and speak in the tongue which it can understand. So it was with Jesus Christ. While there are many senses in which we rightly regard His person as unique and His place in history as exceptional, we do not on that account remove Him from all relation to His own time and people. May we not say with all reverence, that in taking upon Himself our humanity, He became really human? And we shall most rightly interpret Him to ourselves if we remember that, while the Son of God, He was born a

Jew of Palestine. This is especially necessary if we would understand His teaching. He Himself recognised to the full the limitations of His position. True, He spake as one having authority and not as the Scribes, but His subjects were those the Scribes themselves dealt with, and His language was such as they could understand. He speaks always in strict relation to His own time, and yet in such fashion as that His words are true for all time. The law and history and life of the Jews were the shell, and His own new interpretation of these the kernel, of His teaching. He had a message for the world far grander than any that had been entrusted to the Jews, and that would no more rest in the bonds of the Jewish legalism than new wine in old skins. And yet, like the Scribe instructed in the kingdom of heaven, He had old as well as new to bring out of His treasury. The new was in a sense the child of the old, and neither was complete without the other. And so we find Jesus very careful on every possible occasion to relate His teaching to what had gone before. He stood in no antagonism to the past, though He altogether broke with it. He rather hastened and regulated the course of its true development. And this is the sense in which we are to understand the words, "Think not I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil."

Jesus set Himself to correct the popular expectation that the one function of the Messiah would be to abrogate the Law of Moses. He was no ordinary

reformer, *i.e.*, His work was not to overturn the past and put something new in its place, but to fulfil the past. The interpretation of this word "fulfil" has been much disputed, but if we look at it in the light of the many illustrations it receives from the words of Jesus it ought not to be difficult to grasp its meaning. His treatment of the Old Testament revelation (which is what is covered by the term Law and Prophets) is to be distinguished from two things—from pure rejection on the one hand, and from slavish deference on the other. He did not intend to annul the old dispensation, nor did He regard it as the perfect expression of the will of God to man, and bind it upon the hearts and consciences of the people, as did the Scribes and Pharisees. He rather took a middle course, and one superior to either of these. He set forth the revelation of the Old Testament in its highest and most perfect form, and delivered the seed of divine truth from the husk of formalism in which it was enclosed for the weakness of men. He explicated and developed the word of God entrusted to lawgiver and prophets, and this so far from abrogating, only established it in a position of greater authority and truth. This explanation of the word "fulfil" seems the only one consistent with the language which Jesus uses. We require something which, on the one hand, is consistent with the extreme reverence for law shown in the 18th and 19th verses of this chapter, and, on the other hand, will allow Jesus to set aside Old Testament precepts wholesale, saying, "Ye have heard it

said by them of old time, but I say unto you." His fulfilment of the Old Testament dispensation is one which regards it as of divine authority, and therefore precious up to the very least of its commandments; and yet for all that not a last word, but imperfect and liable to be superseded by another and more perfect revelation of the divine will. May we not say (and the point is one which we shall be able to develop later on), may we not say, that the fulfilment of the law and prophets by Jesus is a spiritualisation of them, simply a transference of emphasis from the letter to the spirit. Jesus is in no sense an iconoclast, but His fulfilment is often more sweeping and drastic than much of that which men call destruction.

Now the attitude of Jesus in this matter is of the utmost importance, and one that demands our careful attention, especially in these latter days. Mark the sublimely authoritative position which He assumes. He is, indeed, not speaking as the Scribes. There is nothing of their timid deference to other masters in Him. He stands by His own light, and boldly proclaims His word as the truth, whatever the sacred Scribes of His people may say. We may as well face the fact at once that throughout the Sermon on the Mount He is bent, not indeed, on destroying, but on disparaging the law and prophets. They are God's Word, no doubt, every jot and tittle of them precious in its own place, and yet their light must pale before His. They, too, have to pass in judgment before His consciousness of divine things, and facing that tri-

bunal, they too are found wanting. And this position of Jesus is, in spite of appearances, magnificent in its consistency. Every teacher needs to be an apologist for the past as well as its critic, and Jesus is both to perfection. He shows, as it has been well said, how "progress in theology does not consist in mutilation but in purification. It is not the great facts or ideas that are false, but the way in which they are conceived." And it was this very strength of His position that made it so difficult for men to grasp. To the ordinary Jew it was revolutionary. What does this new teacher mean by quoting the Old Testament in one breath, and in the next setting His law in the place of that of Moses? And subsequent history shows that even the disciples shared in this perplexity, and had not entered into the full freedom of their Master. Had they done so, they would never have needed to debate whether circumcision was necessary in order to enter the Christian Church. It was left for the Apostle of the Gentiles to enter into the full meaning of the words: "Not to destroy, but to fulfil."

And these same words have a very special message to us just now. The attitude of Christians to the Old Testament is scarcely more logical than that of the Scribes of old, and most of us have quite failed to seize the meaning of this declaration of Jesus. It is much to be wished that we would put Him in the position of authority which He claims. In the present distress, when men are asking on every side

for some test or criterion of the inspiration of the Scriptures other than a place in the Canon, on the one hand, and human conscience on the other, is it not well for us to be able to turn to the "But I say unto you" of Jesus Christ. It is not only that His judgment on the Old Testament sets the model for ours, it is that we take this judgment and make it ours. When He declared that He came to fulfil the law and the prophets, He declared that we could only rightly understand them in and through Him. He is the key to the Old Testament Scriptures, and no other key will open the door. Save as they lead up to Him they are purposeless. But this is not all. Save as they are read through Him we are more likely to find error in them than truth. And to say this is not to say, as some do, that Christ set the seal of His authority on every syllable of every book in the Old Testament; it is that He set up Himself as an authority in the light of which the whole of the Old Testament was to be read and judged. He expressly repealed certain parts, and dissociated Himself from the literalistic spirit and methods of the Scribes. Although He would not despise one jot or tittle of the Old Testament, nor teach men so to do, He at the same time showed that the whole Scripture was not of the value of a jot, save as held and interpreted in His spirit and after His example. And for us He has fulfilled the law in giving us Himself as the law's judge. The Christ consciousness is the only court of appeal in matters of revelation.

Spiritual things are to be spiritually discerned. If you would ascertain what is inspiration, and why, what is the divine message of the Old Testament to the world, you will do it, not by the subtlety of your investigation, but by having in you the mind which was in Christ. He spake with an authority which not even Moses possessed. And His Word is a spiritual standard for all time. What is in conformity to Him and His teaching is of God, what is not, is not. The bulwark of our Protestant Churches has been the authority of the Scriptures. There is every sign that we are at present in the throes of a New Reformation which is substituting for the authority of Scripture the authority of Christ. We must welcome the change as being one from the bondage of the letter to the freedom of the spirit. It is the necessary result of the return to Christ, the natural development of His own teaching, the modern aspect of His words, "I am come not to destroy, but to fulfil."

The immediate application of these words, however, was a moral and practical one, and is to be found in the warning which concludes the paragraph, "Except your righteousness," etc. This is another aspect of Christ's method of fulfilling the law. He sets an interpretation and value upon it that is in complete contrast to that of the recognised religious teaching of His day. We need not dwell upon the conception of righteousness, according to the Scribes and Pharisees, which is here condemned. To say that it was external, mechanical, and formal, is less

than the truth. It had reduced religion to a series of minute observances, it had made it a cloak for all manner of injustice and folly, and under its sanction the righteous man was the one who most successfully evaded the real obligations of the law, by most rigidly keeping those which were purely imaginary. We need not go beyond the language of Jesus Himself to discover how barren and even ludicrous was the measure of religion which the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees implied. The important point for us, however, is that at the bottom of it was a firm belief in the obligation of literal obedience to Old Testament law. Its precepts were to be carried out to the extreme of punctiliousness. Therefore, every broad divine command was reduced to its lowest possible terms that all might obey it. And it was in this strict and faithful observance of the letter that true religion was held to consist by the best and most pious spirits among the Jews. And it is very interesting to note how definitely Jesus assumes the position of a critic in relation to this, the established religion of His day. It is not enough for Him simply to shed His light, and open out His new way for men ; He has to clear the ground first, and purge the threshing floor that He may do His work. It is evident from His words that He had carefully studied the caricatures and perversions of religion which the Scribes and Pharisees presented to the world. His picture of them is drawn to the life, and He so states their position that the mere statement of it is, in itself, suffi-

cient condemnation. He leaves His hearers in no doubt as to the root error in their teaching, but condemns absolutely, and on the same grounds, their literalism in dealing with the law and the externalism of their religious life. The righteousness which He enjoins, and which is to be a distinct mark of the kingdom of heaven is both spiritual and inward, proper to those to whom God is Father rather than Lawgiver and Judge. The various qualities and aspects of this new righteousness we shall have many opportunities of discussing. The point that comes before us now is the contrast between this righteousness of Christ, and that of the Scribes and Pharisees. The contrast is an abiding one. It runs through all religious life. It reappears in every religious system, and it divides off Christendom to-day into a true and false following of the Lord Jesus Christ. Nothing could be stronger than the language of Jesus in this connection. He lays down as a condition of entrance into the kingdom of heaven along with faith and repentance, a righteousness which shall exceed that of the Scribes and Pharisees. Would that the condition were kept clearly before men's minds. In the religion of Jesus there is nothing of formality, nothing of the pedantic literalism so often found in the Christian Church. The whole external aspect of religion is, in itself, comparatively worthless. Unless there be the infusing and informing spirit behind it, it is a hindrance rather than an aid to faith. To insist upon creeds, sacraments, forms of Church organisation,

a fixed type of spiritual life and experience before men can become Christians, is to shut them out of the kingdom of heaven. To make religion consist in services, prayers, Sabbath keeping, almsgiving, washings and fasts, is to shut men out of the kingdom of heaven. The grievous yoke of the Scribe and Pharisee is killing the divine life and quenching the spirit in multitudes of Churches to-day. The whole complex system of our religious organisation tends to choke the word and substitute for the free breath of God, blowing where it listeth, the machinery made by men. The people most in peril to-day are just those of whom the men Christ addresses are prototypes. We can see something even at this distance of time of the sensation He made in attacking these revered teachers who sat in Moses' seat. And, believe me, He would make the same sensation to-day. All the fierceness of His anger would be directed against the bishops and deans, the ministers and deacons, the leading church members and prominent religious teachers, and He would say to the sinners, the common people, "Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of these, ye cannot enter the kingdom of God." We cannot study this Sermon on the Mount without seeing that all of us who call ourselves Christians are making professions, which we not only do not live up to, but which we have no desire or intention of living up to. We take the minimum of what we think will be allowed, and we make a great outcry about our observance of that,

and we prepare ourselves to hear one day the Master's scorching word, "Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites." We need not go out of our way to increase the difficulties of discipleship to Jesus. But it must be insisted upon that it involves more than is generally assumed. The religion of Christ is a life—not a mere system of observances. The Pharisee was wonderfully good according to the recognised standards. He was altogether religious, devout, and orthodox to a degree. But he was uncharitable, hard, grasping, selfish. He would always have his pound of flesh, there was not a generous drop of blood in his veins, unless people were of his religion he would have nothing to do with them, he despised the little ones of God, and he let the sinner perish in his sins. He was great in prayer, but he had a bitter tongue. Diligent in attending the Synagogue, he left his religion behind him there. He would only help good orthodox Jews, never a penny of his should go to a Gentile. His goodness was so great that it lifted him far above other men, and few ever came into warm, holy, helpful contact with him. His religion was a crust all round him instead of being the source of all his life and the spring of all his actions, and so his righteousness was no righteousness at all, and against him the door of God's kingdom was hopelessly shut.

My friends, do you not see the bearing of this? We say, no doubt, our righteousness must exceed that of the Scribes and Pharisees; we have a new

law to obey, which is higher than Moses—the law of Christ. Yes, but everything depends on the spirit in which we obey it. If we hedge round the law of Christ, add to it, look at it mainly from the outside, then, for all our Christian name, our righteousness will not exceed that of the Scribes and Pharisees. The thing we have most to beware of is lest our religion become merely a matter of routine and regulation. No doubt a man can live if always shut up in the house, doing little domestic duties ; but his life is a mere stunted affair, compared with that of one out in the free air of heaven mixing among men. So there is a kind of religion after the manner of the Scribes and Pharisees ; but true religious life is free, of the spirit, wide as God's own heart, strong and loving and lovely as God Himself.

SIN AND ITS JUDGMENT

BY REV. W. B. SELBIE, M.A.

SIN AND ITS JUDGMENT

“Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill ; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment.

“ But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment : and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council : but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire.”—MATTHEW v. 21, 22.

THESE words are the formula with which Jesus introduces His repeal of the Old Testament law. They set forth His teaching in the most authoritative form possible, and at the same time distinguishing it from that of His predecessors. As we have seen already, Jesus inculcates a new righteousness which is to be the distinguishing mark of members of His kingdom, and which is far to exceed the orthodox righteousness of the Jewish Rabbis. By this means He is fulfilling the Old Testament law of righteousness, is leading up, *i.e.*, to a level of conduct that shall be far higher than that required under the Old Testament dispensation, and is putting the crowning touches to the building reared by the lawgivers and

prophets of past days. And the point of the Sermon on the Mount which we have now reached deals with the essential character of the new righteousness of Jesus Christ. So far it has been simply distinguished from that which had passed current in the Jewish religious world. Now we have it explained through a series of vivid and even startling illustrations. And it is very necessary that we should bear in mind that these illustrations and examples here given are not by any means exhaustive. They show the working of the new principle of Jesus in several common instances. We must not let them obscure or take the place of the spiritual rule that is behind them. The application of the rule of Christ cannot but be very different in a time like ours from what it was in Palestine eighteen centuries ago. And we must beware of binding upon ourselves the special applications of His law which Christ made instead of applying it for ourselves to the whole of the life of to-day. The instances cited in the Sermon are no doubt of the last importance. But there were special circumstances in the social and religious life of the Jews which singled out these instances as particularly useful and suggestive just then. And Christ's treatment of them is so drastic, the language He uses is so sweeping, that to our own prosaic Western minds the illustrations seem almost to obscure the rules. For one man who sees deep below the surface into the ethical and spiritual signification of the teaching in these next few paragraphs, there are hundreds who

dwell upon the impossibility and apparent absurdity of applying Christ's method to-day, just as He applied it in His own time. Whereas the thing we most need to do is so to study and assimilate Christ's new law as that its application by us to every circumstance of our daily lives will follow naturally, and as a matter of course. It is a reversal of the true order of things to say, as some eminent modern teachers do, that true Christianity is to be attained by literal practice of the precept, say, of absolute non-resistance to evil. The very pith of Christ's own teaching in this sermon is that no mere practice of the rules of piety can ever make a man religious. He must be religious first, have the light in him, and then certain conditions will inevitably follow and the light shine. And so, without either putting aside these practical examples which Christ gives as irrelevant, or regarding them as counsels of perfection, our first business is to examine into the nature of that new righteousness from which they are supposed to flow. And if we come to the application at all, we must by no means confine it to the cases here given us, but let it extend itself to the whole of life. The essence and secret of all the teaching of Jesus as to new righteousness of the kingdom is to be found in its quality of inwardness. The prevailing error of the Scribes and Pharisees was, that they judged of conduct by results. Jesus insists that you must go a step further back and judge by motives. Action proceeds from the heart, disposition, spiritual will, and the quality of the action

is, and only can be, determined by the quality of the heart out of which it proceeds. It is not enough to cleanse the outside of the cup and platter, if it remain unclean within. To cleanse the inside is the most important thing. So the Pharisee might parade his righteousness before God, and pride himself on the excellence of his good works in comparison with those of others, but in the sight of God he was not, after all, so righteous as the Publican who could do nothing more than bewail the sinfulness of his heart. There is, of course, nothing absolutely new in this teaching of Jesus. Every student of the Psalms and Prophets knows that to the deepest religious instincts of the Hebrews it was familiar truth that God searches the hearts of men, and that purity of heart is a first condition of acceptance with Him. But although this is so, the idea never became an authoritative principle in the Old Testament, and in the time of Jesus had lost all binding force. What was new and significant in the position of Jesus was not His assertion for the first time, but His consistent carrying out into practice of this deeper and more inward conception of righteousness. The religion of Jesus Christ is a condition of the heart.

Now mark how absolutely Jesus carries out His principle, and remember in doing so that the whole purpose of the discourse is not to teach the alphabet of morals, or recommend certain examples of conduct, but to lay down a general standard and rule of life. The old law put forth the rough and ready command,

"Thou shalt not kill." But, says Jesus, that is not enough ; you cannot suppose that you have done your whole duty to your fellow-men if you simply refrain from killing them. The question is as to your inner disposition towards them. And I say unto you that you are answerable to my law if you are angry with your brother, if you despise your brother, if you rail against your brother, just as if you had smitten him to death.

So again the old law said, "Thou shalt not commit adultery." But I say unto you, Look into your heart, and if there be there one thought of evil to sully its purity, you are as guilty in My sight as if you had broken the ancient law. The whole question is one of your will, disposition, and heart ; you must go back to the motives of action, to the fountains of life, and only as they are clean will you be.

Now, no doubt this is all very familiar and even commonplace, but it has an importance of its own. And, as has been already said, if we would understand the principle of Jesus we must apply it all round. It is indeed true that, "out of the heart are the issues of life." And the contrast between the inner and outer aspect of conduct is one that has much to do with determining our religion. The danger, in dwelling as we do here on the ethical teaching of Jesus, is lest we come to resolve Christian religion into a mere system of ethics. Nothing, of course, could be more contrary to truth than so to do. And Jesus Himself, by the very language He

uses, seems to warn us against such error. It is true that the full importance of His teaching does not appear until He has sealed it with His death. But we have it foreshadowed again and again, and nowhere more clearly than in His teaching as to the inwardness of moral actions. This involves much more than an ethical system, it is the whole foundation of religion.

We can see this best by contrast with the system of the Jews. In the time of Jesus this was purely external. A man's religion consisted in the degree in which his outward actions conformed to a certain fixed standard. At the back of this religion was the idea of the law. Fear was the great impulsive power. God was primarily a lawgiver, and pushed far away from all direct contact with men, His subjects. The most they could do was rigorously and painfully to try and obey His behests. And the best criticism to be made upon them was that in the prophet's words, "This people honoureth Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me." Now Christ came to change all this. And He did it by a process which was spiritual in its inception and ethical in its results. There is, perhaps, only one word which can in any adequate degree express this process, and that is the familiar term, reconciliation. Jesus, in contradistinction to the Rabbis, brings God near to men, instead of keeping them afar off. And the keynote of His system is no longer to be found in the word "law," but in the word "love." "Law came by Moses, but grace

and truth came by Jesus Christ." And so the starting-point of the new life which the religion of Christ offers to men is no longer a system of conduct, a code of rules, but a changed heart. The knowledge of God's love, as it is declared in the Person of His Son, a love free, gracious, forgiving, and full of compassion, involves a new attitude on the part of its objects. Love is the seed of love. Jesus inspired men with love to God, and therefore made the righteousness of God possible to them, and desirable. At the root of all His ethical teaching is what Dr Chalmers called the "expulsive power of a new affection." And when He insists upon the pure heart as the condition of all good conduct and necessary to acceptance with God, He is but eliciting a life which is there in the germ already, and not seeking to impose it from without. And it is this which involves the joy, the freedom, and the hopefulness of the Christian faith. The teaching of the Sermon on the Mount is on the face of it a hard saying. The standard held up is so high, the character indicated so perfect, that did it come before us only with the sanctions proper to the Jewish law it would drive us to despair. And, indeed, many good Christians to-day do despair of ever reaching the ideal herein set before us. And they do so largely because they approach the matter from the Jewish and Pagan point of view rather than the Christian. If you think that your religion is to begin and end in the vigorousness of your ascetic practice, in the strenuousness of your

effort to copy Christ in all things, you will descend to the level of the Scribes and Pharisees. It is not by the works of the law, whether of Christ or Moses, that a man is saved, but by the obedience of faith. It is out of the changed, inspired, sanctified heart that the issues of this new life proceed. "We have not received the spirit of fear, but of power ;" such is the Christian's expression of the faith which has become an energy of goodness within him. It is true that by his fruits he will be known, that the life he lives is the ultimate test of his faith. But Jesus here reminds us that this life has an inner as well as an outer aspect. Just as the man who comes to lay his gift on the altar can only make acceptable sacrifice as he has a heart cleansed of all enmity and ill-will, just as we cannot worship God aright save as we are faithfully discharging our plain duties to men, so we cannot live the life of Christ until we have hearts inspired by His love, purified and cleansed so as to bring forth fruit unto life everlasting.

We need not then shrink from the test of outward conduct. One of the terrible things about Jesus is His unsparing condemnation of the Scribes and Pharisees. No doubt there were good men and true among them, as there are among those of every type of religion. But Jesus was condemning the system, and would have us to understand how hard it is for a merely formal and conventional religion to produce a righteous man. With the religion of the heart, however, it is different. There the righteous life follows

as a matter of course, a joyful, spontaneous product. And we may say triumphantly with the writer of *Ecce Homo*, "There has scarcely been a town in any Christian country since the time of Christ where a century has passed without establishing a character of such elevation that his mere presence has shamed the bad and made the good better, and has been felt at times like the presence of God Himself." It is indeed true that "Blessed are the pure in heart."

But there is still a difficulty in connection with this subject which we must not leave untouched. How are we to secure that heart and life shall correspond? You say they will do so naturally; if the heart be right, all will be. But, as a matter of fact, they do not, and many a sincere Christian has to say with the Apostle, "When I would do good, evil is present with me." Now Jesus recognised this weakness, and in part, at least, provided against it, "If thy right eye causeth thee to stumble, pluck it out and cast it from thee." Now, what do these words mean? Surely we have not here a wholesale recommendation of asceticism, but a general principle for the guidance of conduct under certain circumstances. And the principle is this, that the righteousness of the kingdom is not to be attained without sacrifice. That there is a strife in our members, of flesh against the spirit, and spirit against the flesh, and that if the one is to be victorious the other must be beaten. There must be sacrifice somewhere. The question for every man is whether he will sacrifice soul or body, whether he will live for

time or eternity. We may thank God that we are free men, not automaton, or puppets pulled by a string; but we shall have to pay the price of our freedom. And that means a continual struggle and a continual sacrifice. Jesus knew the reality of temptation. He warns us that a time will come when we shall have either to cut off a hand or pluck out an eye, or deal a blow at something more vital still. And the law that He gives us is, that when the contest comes, better any sacrifice than suffer the side of the soul and spirit and heart to be defeated. And to support this law we have all the experience and all the common-sense of men. Here, for example, is one who never denied his body anything that it asked. He has drunk his fill of the pleasures of the senses, and indulged his appetites freely. And he has his reward. For the delight of the moment he has paid the stated price. The soul has faded out of his face, and nothing but the animal is visible there. He is scarce worth calling a man. But here is another who has given up his body for the sake of his soul. He has had to pay the fine too, he has had to maim himself in many ways, lost a hand, an eye, a foot, but he too has had his reward. You see it in the face glowing with a deep inward joy, and a peace that passeth understanding; in a life that is evidently shining more and more unto the perfect day. "It is better for thee to enter into life maimed than that the whole body should perish."

Here, again, we must realise that Jesus lays down

no hard and fast rules, but gives us the principle and leaves the application to ourselves. In dealing with this sermon we have so far passed over many points of vexed interpretation, and seemed, no doubt, to make many grave omissions. But I venture to believe that it is not by minutiae of exposition that the special genius of Christ's teaching can be grasped. You do not look at the sun through a microscope. We can see the light of Christ best in the broad principles He laid down. And this, of the supremacy of heart religion and of the inestimable value of the soul or life, is one of the broadest possible.

"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." This Beatitude serves well to sum up the whole. The centre of religion is not in the outward conduct, but in the heart. The vital question is where to get the cleansed and contrite heart that we need. The prayer we need to pray is this, "Take away the stony heart and give me a heart of flesh." The work of Christ rises far above that of all the teachers of morals, because He not only shows us the need of the new heart, but tells us where we may find it. His "But I say unto you," is a word of authority and life, because it is He who said it, and because He has shown His power, as the Son of God, to be not only a law giver but the giver of life.

"If our love were but more simple we should take Him at His word :

And our lives would be all sunshine in the sweetness of our Lord."

THE SIN OF ANGER

BY REV. A. ROWLAND, D.D., LL.B., B.A.

THE SIN OF ANGER

“Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill ; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment.

“But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment : and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council : but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire.”—MATTHEW v. 21, 22.

IN this sermon our Lord declared that He came not to destroy the law and the prophets, but to fulfil them. He then went on to give examples of His meaning, one of which we are about to consider. It relates to the sixth commandment, which runs, “Thou shalt not kill.” The passage is seldom studied, but it is worth studying, for the teaching in it affects us all, and is not peculiar to any time or place.

It may be well to discover the precise meaning of the command, “Thou shalt not kill,” that we may see how it was understood by the Jews ; and how it was expounded and enlarged by Jesus.

I.

And first—What was its meaning ?

It is not always a wicked thing to take away life. This was distinctly recognised by Moses, the great

lawgiver, in other enactments which belonged to the same system of ethics as this precept does. God Himself ordained that in certain cases men should be put to death, in order that thus evil might be cast out from among His people, for the pollution of society is always a worse thing in His sight than the death of an individual. Indeed, in the formative period of Jewish history, even the Vendetta was tolerated, as we can see by the regulations which refer to the Avenger of Blood, although the old custom was restricted and modified, in order that it might become no longer an act of personal or tribal revenge, but a rough yet real execution of justice.

From this it is evident that the command, "Thou shalt not kill," did not refer to the mere act of taking away life. Indeed, in private relations, when a man killed another by accident, if he hated him not in time past, he was not to be punished. Such facts ought to have led the Jews to see that when God gave the command, "Thou shalt not kill," He was not referring to the act so much as to the hatred which in His sight made the act a sin. This should have been the more clear to them, because another express command, recorded in Leviticus xix. 17, ran thus: "Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thy heart." In this, then, Jesus came not to destroy the law, but to fulfil it.

The Rabbis, in their mechanical, soulless way, had interpreted the law as applying only to the act of murder, not to the anger and hatred which made the

act sinful. If, for example, a man hired an assassin to kill his adversary, or, if he let loose wild beasts upon him, so that he died, according to them he had not broken the sixth commandment. Those forty Jews who bound themselves by an oath to kill Paul would, if their plot had succeeded, have escaped scot-free from every ecclesiastical tribunal in the land. In this, as in much else, the word of God was made of none effect through their tradition.

Now, though Jesus made the law more wide in its reach, it must be remembered that at the same time He intensified its natural and primal application. Life was more sacred to Him than it could appear to be to any human judge, because He knew better than any one else its awful possibilities, and all that hinged upon it in the eternal future. Therefore, in interpreting His words, we must not lessen in any degree the guilt of that dreadful crime which Dryden so vividly puts in lines addressed to an imaginary murderer :

“Think, timely think, on the last dreadful day,
How you will tremble there, to stand exposed
The foremost in the rank of guilty ghosts
That must be doomed for murder !
Think on murder !
That troop is placed apart from common crimes ;
The damned themselves start wild and shun that band
As far more black and more forlorn than they.”

The horror with which men regard that crime is God-implanted, and from the very thought of it as a

possible sin, we naturally shrink back appalled. Because we instinctively do so, there was all the more reason that Jesus should unveil the real sin which lay at the back of murder, and that He should show that it may be committed in spirit by those who never imbrue their hands in a brother's blood.

"I say unto you, that whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause, shall be in danger of the judgment."

Although that phrase "without a cause" is relegated to the margin in our Revised Version, it is not without authority; and it certainly expresses a limitation of our Lord's meaning, which is plainly indicated in other Scriptures. All anger is not wicked. Indeed, it is good for ourselves and good for society, under some conditions, to be downright angry. Far better have an outburst of hot indignation than the cool cynical indifference which often prevails about wrong-doing. If a man's face does not tingle when it is slapped, his body is out of health, and if his heart doth not tingle when confronted with cruelty or wrong, his soul is out of health, sick, and ready to die. If righteousness is a witness of injustice, if chastity is confronted by rudeness, if liberty is threatened by proud tyranny, if love discerns cruelties inflicted on the weak and helpless—then indignation and anger are right, and he follows Christ, the Deliverer, most truly, who, at any risk, will strike down the wrong. That is not the anger condemned here, for wicked anger is causeless and

irrational, hasty and unjust, spiteful and malignant, but *that* anger is really the offspring of love to man and to God, to purity and righteousness.

Yet there is no doubt that Jesus did extend the application of the ancient law. He showed that though a man might not have much difficulty in keeping within the four corners of the command "Thou shalt not kill," he might fail to keep it in the judgment of God. It is not the outward act of sin which brings divine judgment, any more than it is the outward act of worship which wins divine approval. Physical actions in themselves are nothing to God, except as they indicate spiritual conditions, which outlive the body and outlast the environment of this world. If, therefore, from fear of punishment, or from lack of courage, or from the pressure of circumstances, we never commit murder, we may still be arraigned before the dread tribunal of God's judgment-seat, if we are angry with our brother, aye, even though our sinful temper does not express itself in word or deed. Well may we say, with the Psalmist, "Thy commandment is exceeding broad," for it takes in much that no other law reaches, and seeks to bring every thought and passion under its control.

But our inward life is so tangled and disorganised that we are sometimes perplexed in our self-judgment, and feel compelled to say, "Who can understand his errors? Cleanse thou me from secret faults." Therefore our Lord exemplifies His meaning in a very

striking fashion in the latter part of the twenty-second verse. After alluding to anger which is not only causeless but silent, He speaks of its development revealing itself in words of scorn, for so I think we may understand the expressions "Raca" and "Thou fool."

Many readers have thought there was something peculiarly wicked about the words which Jesus here mentions, but that was not His meaning. Indeed, it would be contrary to the whole genius of His teaching if it were so, because He never made right or wrong dependent upon phrases of any sort. Raca meant an "empty, conceited person," and was used by the Jews as an expression of ridicule, just as many a slang epithet is thus employed by us now. It can hardly be translated, but perhaps "you good-for-nothing fellow" would be a fair English equivalent, or any other phrase similar to it, now commonly used as an expression of the angry feeling which self-control can no longer restrain. It is because in such expletives this control is beginning to break down under the impulse of anger, that the sin of the angry man is here represented as growing worse.

"Thou fool" is another word which, neither in English nor in the original Greek, expresses anything particularly wicked. Indeed, our Lord Himself used it when, addressing the Pharisees (Matthew xxiii. 17) He exclaimed, "Ye fools and blind." I should take these phrases to be an endeavour on the part of the Great Teacher to indicate progress

in anger, as if He had said, "It is wrong to be angry, it is worse to betray such anger in bitter words, and even in such expressions of it there are differences in moral guilt, although they may all fall short of the act of murder."

The fact is that words, written or spoken, may kill what is more valuable to a man or woman than life itself. Slander is still common. A business may be ruined, family happiness may be destroyed, Christian usefulness may be terminated, by the cruel words of those who are angry with their brothers. To kill a man's reputation is often as fatal in result, and as iniquitous in its motive, as to kill his body, after which there is no more that they can do. Men doing a noble work have sometimes been checked, and even ruined, by those whose tongues have been set on fire of hell. The pious and learned Saurin was not the only man who died a victim to slander, literally dying, as he did, of a broken heart.

"He that shall rail against his absent friends,
Or hears them scandalised and not defends ;
Sports with their fame and speaks whate'er he can,
And only to be thought a witty man ;
Tells tales and brings his friends to disesteem ;
That man's a knave—be sure beware of him."

All slander, all bitter words, all angry cursing and reviling, are here implicitly condemned by our Lord.

Not only is the gradual progress of anger portrayed here, but this fact also is pointed out, that there are different degrees of guilt, according to which punishment will be proportioned. Hear what our Lord says: He who is guilty of causeless anger will be in "danger of the judgment"; he who lets such anger break out into hasty speech shall be "in danger of the council"; and he who suffers it so to rule him that he is guilty of deliberate insult, shall be "in danger of Gehenna."

These are Jewish expressions, and here they are intended by our Lord to remind us of the great truth that there are degrees in the punishments of the future, apportioned by Him who shall give to every man according as his works shall be. The "judgment" was a technical name for the bench of municipal magistrates, who, in every small town, exercised jurisdiction.

The "council" was the higher court known as the Sanhedrin, consisting of seventy elders and a president. This took cognisance of graver offences, such as treason and blasphemy. It was a Court of Appeal from the lower tribunals, and could execute heavier penalties, including the death penalty. The next phrase, "shall be cast into hell fire," is an unfortunate translation, because it seems to point directly to the future punishment of the impenitent, as the other phrases do not. It should be rendered a "Gehenna of fire." The allusion is to that dreadful and doleful valley of Hinnom, called Tophet, formerly used for

the idolatrous and cruel rites of Moloch worship, and afterward made a burning-place for all the refuse of Jerusalem; and it was often used by the Jews as a symbol of the future punishment of the lost.

Looking at this verse from the Jewish standpoint, as we are bound to do, we see in it three images of unknown retribution which will fall on those who commit such sins. We are taught by them that there will be an ascending series of punishments proportioned to different degrees in crime; and these solemn words remind us, that even in a gospel of mercy, penalties of wrong-doing are not swept away. These images are but the shadows of the invisible realities, which as yet, to human ears, are unutterable. By the very mystery and horror of the future, our Lord would call us all to repentance, even though our sins are found in unspoken passions rather than in criminal acts; and "if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

It is no wonder, then, that our Lord goes on to urge us to reconciliation with God and with our fellow-men, for the two are closely associated. A lowly acknowledgment of our sins in prayer humbles and softens us, and makes it easier for us to seek reconciliation with our brothers. To all who would worship God acceptably, Jesus says, "If thou bring thy gift to the altar and there rememberest that thy brother hath aught against thee, leave there thy gift before the

altar and go thy way ; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift."

Is not this lesson needed as much in this country as in Jerusalem? Is it not as applicable to some of us as to those who encircled Jesus? Would it not be well for us to remember it when we too thoughtlessly say, "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those that trespass against us?" Brethren, we cannot worship a God of love while our hearts are filled with hate; for if we love not our "brother whom we have seen, how shall we love God whom we have not seen"? In His presence, offences which seemed very large, dwindle into insignificance, and the consciousness of His love not only to us but to our estranged brother will help us to love that brother too. The altar of prayer is the best starting-point for all reconciliations.

To any here who are conscious of estrangement I would say, Life is too short for quarrels and severances. Its brevity and uncertainty appeal to all who are sundered in spirit, or angry at heart, to make it up between them quickly. If you had wronged some one, and news came to you to-day that he was dead, I know your heart would soften to him. You would think of any kindnesses he once did, of virtues he had which your anger had caused you to forget, and you would wish that something had been said or done which might have brought you together. And this may happen with any of us. Do not make yourself hard to approach, even if all the wrong was on his

side. Do not seek any longer to see how you may retaliate. As Shakespeare puts it :

“Heat not the furnace for your foe so hot
That it do singe yourself.”

And if new provocations come, if the angry surf of other men's passions breaks over your life, confront it with patience, with quiet dignity, aye, with the love of the Christ who died blessing His foes, and that defence will prove to be like the sandy beach from which the furious waves draw back defeated, leaving nothing behind them but froth and shells. He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he that ruleth his own spirit than he that taketh a city. May God give each of us victory over self.

SINS OF LUST

BY REV. A. ROWLAND, D.D., LL.B., B.A.

SINS OF LUST

"Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery," etc.—MATTHEW v. 27-32.

THERE are many advantages in studying Scripture consecutively. Among these may be reckoned the necessity which is thus laid upon us for dealing with delicate or difficult subjects, from the public consideration of which we might otherwise be inclined to shrink. And if we are faithful stewards of divine truth we shall be anxious to declare the whole counsel of God, and to give due prominence in our teaching to every subject upon which our Lord and Master spoke to His disciples, and to the listening ages which silently stood behind them. The necessary occasion for dealing with all these topics arises spontaneously when we expound verse after verse, chapter after chapter in their order, or when we limit ourselves for a time to the consideration of one consecutive discourse which fell from the lips of the Great Teacher. In other spheres of study we are conscious of a similar advantage. The author of *A Tour round my Garden*, for example, shows how much more may

be learned by investigating one little plot of ground, with all the varieties of life contained in it, than by gazing generally on the world at large. Indeed, all knowledge in the present day shows a tendency to specialise itself, and he knows most accurately what is true who concentrates his thought on one department of study, and sees all the particulars which are in it. Similar is the advantage of studying thoughtfully, and prayerfully, one section of God's Word.

There were few topics on which our Lord spoke more clearly and emphatically than the relations between the sexes, and again and again in the course of His ministry He reverted to it. There is a sort of indelicate delicacy, however, which, both in our homes and in our Churches, has wrought grievous mischief by the silence which is maintained. Knowledge has been sought from sources secret and corrupt, instead of in the holy confidence of parental and filial relations; while some, unwarned of evil, have drifted into the whirlpool of vice before they knew of their peril. But since our Lord frankly dealt with such questions, since the stability of society, the sanctity of home, and the safety of the Church, all rest upon the purity of family life, no apology is required for speaking about them.

Our Lord had already exemplified His declaration, "I came not to destroy the law and the prophets, but to fulfil them," by alluding to the Sixth Commandment, "Thou shall not kill," and now He turns for

illustration to the Seventh Commandment, "Thou shalt not commit adultery."

It is a divine law, fundamental to the prosperity of human society, that sexual love should bind together one man and one woman, so that they shall become one flesh, completing in their unity God's ideal of humanity, as well as providing for the propagation of the race. Marriage, therefore, is not a mere civil contract to be lightly entered into or lightly abandoned ; it is a divine institution, sacred in itself and in its issues, and any who tamper with it, whether it be an individual or a society, will do so at their peril.

Our Lord goes back to primeval law. He alludes to the fact that the Creator assigned one woman to one man, and it might still be inferred that this was a divine ordinance both from the equal number of each born into the world, and from the fact that man and woman are complements to each other, in their union completing an ideal—the image of God. Even in uncivilised and savage tribes traces of this sacred institution still exist, and although polygamy, concubinage, celibacy, and other evils have at times defied the Divine Will, yet primeval marriage survives, and was never more honoured and honourable than in the home-life of Protestant England. An offence against marriage is an offence not only against society but against God. Hence our Lord insists that the sin of adultery lies not in the outward act only, but in the indulgence of evil desire. He does not refer to a casual glance, or to the momentary rising of passion

which is speedily repressed, but to the voluntary and purposeful gaze which passionate desire may inspire, and which the will permits to indulge itself, for with such an one literal obedience to the command becomes only due to the want of opportunity, or to the fear that impunity cannot be had. There are spectacles to be seen in some places of amusement, there are indulgences which just stop short of actual vice, and there is corrupt matter poured forth by the press which no one can touch without being defiled, and against all these the words of our Lord are directed. Indeed, when we remember that He who thus speaks will be our Judge, and that it is by His law, not by the law of society, our destiny will be determined, when we realise that He knows all about the inward life as well as about the outward life, we may all feel ashamed, and we may well humble our hearts before Him who can cleanse us from secret faults, and who by His grace can guard us from all pollution and make us living temples of the Holy Ghost.

Our Lord further intimates that prayer of itself is not enough for cleansing. He urges that we should pluck out the right eye, or cut off the right hand, if these lead us into sin. This language is figurative, of course, for neither the one nor the other sacrifice would conquer lust; but it vigorously sets before us the truth that we must be prepared to make any sacrifice rather than sin, even though we cast away from us what in some respects may be innocent and useful. Similarly, St Paul says about himself, "I

buffet my body and bring it into bondage," as if only by pains and efforts he could subdue the evil which still tried to assert its power, so resolved was he by God's grace that the body should not rule him but that he would rule the body. And, after all, this is the only course worthy of a Christian—may I not say of a man? for it is brutish to be led by instinct or to be driven by passion. Christ came to redeem us from the tyranny of these, and to give us the liberty of God's children, helping us to reign as kings over our own nature. But in order to do this there are sacrifices to be made, and sins to be avoided, of which each one must judge for himself, because what to one may be innocent, to another may be full of peril. We are not all alike in this respect or in any respect. There are pleasantnesses in society which may have to be abjured by one, though another may be unharmed by them. There are works of art about which we may say, "To the pure all things are pure," but which might prove perilous to others; and in regard to these we must not be hasty in judging our fellows, whose hearts are known to God only; nor must we attempt to lay down general laws of conduct for everybody. We must content ourselves with the inculcation of the principles on which these laws of conduct are to be based. But, on the other hand, let us not trifle with our own moral safety. Let us not suppose that we can safely do whatever others do, and go wherever others go, and read whatever others read. Knowing your own propensities and perils, shut to the door and pray to thy

Father which seeth in secret, and about all that is doubtful say, "Show me Thy way, O Lord, teach me Thy paths, lead me in Thy truth and teach me, for Thou art the God of my salvation, on Thee do I wait all the day."

If there be a way of God marked by the footsteps of Jesus, in which He longs for us to walk, and from which we are prone to stray in thought and desire, it is the path of purity. Indeed, there are those who, while professing to know something of God's grace themselves, declare that it is not possible to walk in it, that physical laws are stronger than moral laws, which means that the brute in man is mightier than the grace in man, that in such matters the devil is omnipotent. Let us cast from our minds this gospel of despair, for it is a gospel of lies. Human nature is weak enough without having its hope of salvation swept away by the theories of misled Christians; and the souls of young men Christ died to save have been ruined because they have been taught that a chaste life is impossible. We may thank God it is not impossible. Many after stern conflict have the blessedness of those who overcome, and the safety of those around whom the holy angels gather as they gathered around the Christ after the agony of Gethsemane. It is not of woman alone, but of man, that Milton's words hold good:

"So dear to Heaven is saintly chastity,
That when a soul is found sincerely so,
A thousand liv'ried angels lackey her,
Driving far off each thing of sin and guilt."

It yet remains for us to revert to the subject of divorce, of which Jesus speaks in the thirty-first and thirty-second verses. He dealt with the question more fully on another occasion, and the passages of Scripture which bear upon it ought to be carefully studied, especially by those who have influence in settling or altering the laws of society. We can only touch upon it here. Indeed, it is brought in by our Lord Himself on this occasion in a subsidiary position, as an outcome of what He had said on marriage.

He implies that the law as given by Moses was not ideally perfect, although it was a wise and strong attempt to bring the condition of things around him nearer to God's ideal of what it should be. Moses found that the effect not only of Egyptian laxity, but of patriarchal polygamy, had been a loosening of the marriage tie, so that a wife was dismissed on any pretext. Accordingly he ordained that this severance should only be for some fault of uncleanness, and should be pronounced publicly; the reasons being set forth and witnessed to in a formal document. This was doubtless as far as he could go in the way of restraint. A more exacting law would have been disobeyed, increasing the evil it was sought to lessen. The Mosaic law, thus lowered in its demands because of the hardness of the people's hearts, little by little became in practice lowered still more, until when Jesus Christ came divorce was very frequent, and

for such trifles that the sacredness of marriage was seriously affected. He therefore re-affirmed the sacredness and indissolubleness of the tie, only making the one exception, namely, that in which the wife had practically broken the bond by her criminal act. Count Tolstoy and others have maintained that even this exception was not made by our Lord, but was introduced into the manuscripts of the New Testament in the fifth century. Its retention in the Revised Version, however, shows that the authorities are in favour of it, and that for this special case Jesus did allow divorce. On this our present law is supposed to rest. The miserable revelations of the Divorce Court have startled and horrified the moral sense of the people, but it is very doubtful whether the practical effect of the administration of the Statute of 1857 does not frequently violate in spirit the teaching of our Lord. And in America things are still worse, for divorces have been increasing there at a greater rate than the population.

There was an interesting article on this subject which appeared in the *Forum* about ten years ago, by Mr Philips, once the United States Minister to the Court of St James, who deals with the question simply from the civil standpoint. On another occasion Mr Gladstone wrote a powerful article in the *North American Review*, in which he speaks of divorce from Scriptural and Christian standpoints. These and other wise teachers have convincingly

shown that divorced people should not again be allowed to marry, whatever the hardships sometimes involved. This would prevent many an evil, and would do something to restore the sweetness and sacredness of the marriage tie; for it is to be feared that divorce made easy has perceptibly lessened the standard of conjugal morality; most of all in the classes of society which have availed themselves of the present law.

Meanwhile, for our own sakes, and for the sake of society, and of the future of our country, we must let these sayings of our Lord sink deeply into our hearts. If any young people can look forward to homes of their own, they should thank God for it, and not fear to face, hand to hand and heart to heart, difficulties and even some privations. The subject we have considered is not to be made the subject of banter and joke and silly gossip, for, more than any other choice, this of a partner for life will be momentous in its issues to ourselves and others, and all need to think and pray as well as feel and fancy. Above all, let us re-echo the words of Paul to each of us, "Keep thyself pure," for into heaven there shall in no wise enter anything that defileth, and even here on earth God's face will be seen and His work will be done by those who are pure in heart. May we be able to go forth to fight against all evils, as did Galahad, the stainless knight, who could joyously sing, "My strength is as the strength of ten, because my heart is pure."

THE SIN OF SWEARING

BY REV. A. ROWLAND, D.D., LL.B., B.A.

THE SIN OF SWEARING

“Again, ye have heard that it hath been said by them of old time, Thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shalt perform unto the Lord thine oaths :

“But I say unto you, Swear not at all ; neither by heaven ; for it is God’s throne :

“Nor by the earth ; for it is His footstool : neither by Jerusalem ; for it is the city of the great King.

“Neither shalt thou swear by thy head, because thou canst not make one hair white or black.

“But let your communication be, Yea, yea ; Nay, nay : for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil.”—MATTHEW v. 33-37.

THIS passage affords a good example of the way in which the Jewish Rabbis altered and modified divine commands, thus making void the Word of God through their traditions. “Again, ye have heard that it hath been said by them of old time, Thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shalt perform unto the Lord thine oaths.”

The first clause in this verse is the ancient law against perjury, freely quoted from Leviticus xix. 12, “Ye shall not swear by my name falsely” ; while the second clause is from Numbers xxx. 2, “If a man swear an oath to bind his soul with a bond, he shall

not break his word," where the reference is not to oaths taken in a court of justice, but to vows of gift, or of sacrifice, or of service. The effect of adding the one to the other as a sort of qualification, was to make forbidden perjury consist only in the non-performance of religious vows, in the fulfilment of which the ecclesiastics were interested ; even this, they said, was not to be regarded as perjury in cases where the name of Jehovah was not actually used. It was no wonder that Jesus Christ, the King of Truth, sternly condemned such perversion and quibbling about divine commands.

Falsehood was thus encouraged, and this not only violated God's law, but was ruinous to society, as was clearly seen in the Lord's own day. Untruth had become so common that men could not safely trust their neighbours. The condition of things was almost as sad in this respect as they now are in India, where truth is hardly expected from one's neighbour, and plenty of false witnesses can easily be bought by any unscrupulous man. And another evil followed—for the Jews, in order to back up their assertions, in the fear that otherwise they would not be believed, profanely used the names of sacred things, and felt themselves safe in doing so, if only they fell short of mentioning the name of Jehovah Himself. Besides this, they would call imprecations on their heads, or on their eyes, with a frequency which was horrifying, and which unhappily is too common in our day.

Now, in dealing with this topic, Jesus did not

lessen in any degree, but on the contrary greatly intensified, the law of God against perjury, which ran, "Thou shalt not forswear thyself." This sin of perjury contained in it disobedience to two fundamental commands, "Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour," and "Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain." The person taking an oath in a court of justice not only promised to speak the truth, but called upon God Himself to witness that he did so. He avowed his belief that he was speaking in the presence of One who knew the truth, and who read his heart, of One who could divine what was true, and who could avenge what was false ; and this oath was taken solemnly for two reasons : the first, to remind himself that he must speak truly, and the other to remind others that he was about to do so, and thus the better to secure their belief.

It is, of course, evident that oath-taking, even in a court of justice, is a humiliating confession of the sad absence in human society of truth, and therefore of trust. No such calling on God to witness would ever be required if men habitually spoke and acted as if an All-Seeing God was beside them, or if untruth were not so common as to have destroyed men's belief in the simple statements of their fellows. What the Lord Jesus Christ longed to see everywhere, and what He did much to promote, was a state of society in which there should no longer be any necessity for an oath to be taken. In His Church, at least, men

ought to be so conscious of their Lord's presence, and so loyal to the truth He loves, that simple affirmation or denial would command absolute and instantaneous belief on the part of all who heard it.

Even in the Pagan world we may discover examples of men whose truthfulness was so conspicuous that no one would venture to doubt any statement they made. The philosopher Xenocrates was an example of this. He was called upon to give evidence during a trial in Athens, and was about to advance to the altar to swear to the truth of his deposition, as was then the custom, when the judges, rising from their seats, unanimously declared that they had such absolute trust in him that his bare assertion would be sufficient without any oath to back it. Surely, amongst the disciples of the Lord Jesus, then, we ought already and always to see what we hope will ultimately prevail in the world at large, when it becomes Christ's kingdom, namely, the blessedness of mutual trust, and of universal confidence in each other's integrity. To all His followers, at least, Jesus says, "But I say unto *you*, Swear not at all, neither by Heaven, for it is God's throne ; nor by the earth, for it is His footstool ; neither by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King ; but let your communication be, Yea, Yea ; Nay, Nay : for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil." Shakespeare well puts this before us in the lines :

"'Tis not the many oaths that make the truth ;
But the plain single vow that's vowéd true."

It is, perhaps, hardly to be wondered at that such a strong declaration as this, "Swear not at all," should have been regarded by many devout persons as forbidding the practice of taking oaths in a court of justice. The Quakers and Moravians, for example, have maintained this steadily throughout their history, in spite of suffering and obloquy. English law years ago made an exception in their favour, and this exception has been broadened and extended within the memories of some of us. Our legislature was justified in doing this, for conscience should always be respected. Indeed, the conscientiousness of such men was one of the best guarantees that they would speak the truth. For all that, however, I do not think that the interpretation these good people put upon our Lord's words is sound. Christians are not forbidden to take such oaths as the courts of law may demand, while there continues to be in society the want of trust and the want of truth which unhappily prevails. Probably, until the moral tone of the whole community is raised nearer to Christ's ideal, in which every man's "Yea" will be Yea, and his "Nay," Nay, the forbidding of oaths might be an observance of the letter of His command, rather than an exhibition of the spirit implied by it. Indeed, if we turn to the Gospels, we find that the Lord Himself gave evidence under oath, in an ecclesiastical court of law, when it was administered by the High Priest, and until the legal form of words was addressed to Him He remained silent. In the Acts of the

Apostles, and in the Epistles, we read more than once that Paul called upon God to witness that he was speaking the truth. Whatsoever is more than a simple affirmation no doubt does come of evil, as our Lord said, for it is due to the prevalence of sin, and to the consequences of sin. But while sin remains, if we can safeguard public interests by the administration of oaths, we are free to do so, and the Christian who takes an oath only expresses, for the security of others, what he in his heart always believes, namely, that God is near, and that He will judge. To refuse to give evidence in this form, whilst it might seem to be obedience to the letter, might sacrifice the spirit of the command which had regard to the interests of justice and of truth.

There are two sins here which our Lord did, however, condemn very emphatically, namely, profanity and untruthfulness. The oaths referred to in verses 35 and 36 were what we should call conversational oaths. Instead of a simple asseveration, it was a common thing for a Jew to say, "By Jerusalem," or, "By heaven, this is true." He maintained that there was no harm in this, because the name of Jehovah was not used, but only a place which was associated with Him. Jesus, however, showed that, so far as these words had any force at all, they derived it from their association of "heaven," or of "earth," or of "Jerusalem," with God, and this, therefore, in spirit, was taking God's name in vain.

Our Lord alludes also to another class of profane

swearing, which consisted in imprecations on their own heads, if they were saying what was false. This, He declared, was also, in essence, an appeal to God, because He alone could judge of the man's veracity, and punish him if he was speaking lies. If a statement so made was untrue, the sin was perjury ; if, on the other hand, it was true, it was profanity ; therefore Jesus said, "Swear not at all." There is still need to repeat these words of solemn warning which were uttered by our Lord, and to apply them to the coarse and profane expletives which defile the minds and corrupt the talk of many around us. Happily, the habit of profane swearing has sunk down to a lower level in English society. It is no longer the mark of a gentleman, as it was in the time of the Georges, to garnish conversation with oaths, for any one who does so now would be regarded as unfitted for polite society. But amongst certain classes of people, coarse and blasphemous language is still far too common ; and it might be well if some acted now as Sir Christopher Wren did during the building of St Paul's Cathedral. He affixed to several parts of the structure the following notice, which perhaps is worth placing on record :—

"Whereas, among labourers and others, that ungodly custom of swearing is so frequently heard to the dishonour of God and contempt of His authority ; and to the end that such impiety may be utterly banished from these works which are intended for the service of God and the honour of religion, it is ordered that profane swearing shall be

a sufficient crime to dismiss any labourer that comes to the call ; and the clerk of the works, upon a sufficient proof, shall dismiss him accordingly : and that, if any master working by task shall not, upon admonition, reform the profanation among his apprentices, servants, and labourers, it shall be construed his fault, and he shall be liable to be censured by the Commissioners."

Possibly those whom education has enriched with a fuller vocabulary may not be so strongly tempted to indulgence in this sinful habit ; but if for "every idle word" we shall have to give an account, we may well put up the Psalmist's prayer : "Set a watch, O Lord, upon the door of my lips, that I sin not with my tongue." Let us listen to good George Herbert's counsel :

"Take not His name, who made thy mouth, in vain :
It gets thee nothing, and hath no excuse.
Lust and wine plead a pleasure, avarice gain ;
But the cheap swearer, through his open sluice,
Lets his soul run for nought."

But besides remembering this command against profane swearing, we must also heed our Lord's solemn warning against every form of untruth. "Let your Yea be Yea, and your Nay, Nay." Let us look on to that ideal state of society which Christ sets before us, and which shall ultimately be established, in which the characteristics of His kingdom—purity, and truth, and reverence—shall be everywhere paramount. It will be a state in which every one will speak the truth, and every one

will believe his fellow. All through the weary ages the existence of oaths has been an outstanding evidence of man's depravity—a sign that he has wandered from the God of truth who has solemnly declared that all liars shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone, which is the second death. He is a God of truth, and without iniquity ; just and right is He. And conscious as we must be of our unlikeness to Him in this, we should in all lowliness confess our sins before Him, that we may be not only forgiven but cleansed from iniquity, for nothing but His grace can purge us and keep us from all evil.

Probably the temptation to seek gain was never stronger than it is now. Never was competition more keen, or more ruthless. Never were facilities for deceiving others more numerous than they are amidst the complications of modern society, and those who move in the commercial world know how difficult it is for a strictly honest and truthful man to make a bare living, and still less to attain a fortune. In order to withstand such temptations, men need to have the courage and watchfulness of good soldiers of Jesus Christ. But to all professing Christians the great honour has been assigned of purging modern commerce of its trickery, and every profession of any falseness which may cling to it. Unscrupulous traders have already lost us some of the markets which once were ours ; they have sullied the noble reputation for honest and straightforward dealing which was formerly

our national boast. Our courts of law are perpetually revealing the infamies of men who cheat and lie in the service of Mammon: and we have much to learn from the noblest heathen philosophers. It is said that when Aristotle was asked the question, "What will a man gain by telling a falsehood?" he answered, "Never to be credited when he speaks the truth," and he simply said what no sane man can deny. Unhappily, the falsehood of some too often involves distrust of others, till a whole nation suffers. For these reasons, as well as for others that are higher, let it be ours in scenes of difficulty, and even of danger, to uplift the standard of the King of Truth, and to contend against all who would lower it or sully it; and let us not forget that the secret of courage and strength for doing this will be found in the realised presence of God, to whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secret thing is hid.

However it may be with others, and whatever the tone of society in which we move, we must ever heed the injunction of the Master, "Let your Yea be Yea, and your Nay, Nay, for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil."

"This above all, to thine own self be true,
And it must follow, as the night the day,
Thou canst not then be false to any man."

THE VICTORY OF LOVE OVER
WRONG

BY REV. THOMAS G. SELBY

THE VICTORY OF LOVE OVER WRONG

“Resist not him that is evil : but whosoever smiteth thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if any man would go to law with thee, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloke also. And whosoever shall compel thee to go one mile, go with him twain. Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away.”—
MATTHEW v. 39-42.

IT is perhaps needless to say that this language depicts the most extreme illustrations of oppression and injustice under which the new principle here enunciated must be applied. In His statement of the problem Jesus allows Himself the license of Oriental metaphor. He draws in outline pictures of ideal behaviour, the boldness of which was intended to startle and perhaps also for the moment to antagonise. We do no dishonour to the Great Teacher if we see rhetorical emphasis in these words, blended even with a touch of humour in describing the possible situations in which this new principle of loving meekness must be shown. But when we have taken all this into our reckoning we are compelled to feel that

there is serious, solid, solemnising obligation in these phrases which seem to verge upon paradox. Jesus Himself at least in His day, lived up to the essential substance of these counsels, whether we consider them impracticably high for ourselves and our age or not.

The domination of a foreign power obviously gives rise to these distressing situations in which the virtues of long-suffering, resignation, peaceful endurance and unstinted generosity must be exercised. Four situations are brought before us in these descriptions of what a disciple ought to be. He is looked at as a sufferer from despotic brutality—the brutality of the strong towards the weak—and is taught the best method of meeting it. His personal possessions are threatened with spoliation under the forms of law, and some better remedy must be tried than an appeal to foreign tribunals. The disciple may be pressed into the drudgery of military service, and he must bow his head to the ruthless conqueror, and not try single-handed conclusions with a press-gang. And if insatiable tax-gatherer, or an extortionate soldiery, or a needy claimant of his own race, ask, in tones of menace, more than is due, the unreasonable claim must be met to the extent of the disciple's ability. Of course this does not imply a Christian must give money which is not his own, pledge his credit, which may be the same thing, or empty his pockets in response to the clamour of a worthless tramp who has his eye on a public-house bar.

Jesus addressed these special counsels to His followers in view of the appalling world-powers which were confronting them in their mission. He was sending them forth into strange kingdoms governed by cruel administrators, "as sheep into the midst of wolves." They had not the faintest chance of survival upon any other principle than this. A more strenuous and fiery policy would have been one and the same thing with suicide. The secret of self-preservation is hidden in these teachings. If we have a Christianity of any kind in our midst to-day, it is because the first disciples did their best to follow this principle, "Resist not him that is evil."

These words formulate a policy which must guide the disciples in the missionary enterprises upon which they are about to enter.

They will soon find themselves frowned upon by the rulers of this world, and will be buffeted and opposed at every turn, beyond the lot even of their unhappy countrymen. They must not imagine they are to play the hero upon Maccabean lines. These words go much further than to declare that the insurrection of the impotent Jew against the mailed and mighty Roman is hopeless. Those who belong to the divine kingdom will conquer Rome but by new arms and a new order of character. Their ethic must transcend the ethic of righteous Jew or law-respecting Roman. The policy of strict retaliation towards the injustice and inequality of the world has been a failure wherever tried, drenching the soil with blood

and dividing the race of man into quivering fractions. An entirely new note must be struck in human affairs. It is possible to win by contrast, especially if the new ideal which is set up is obviously diviner than that to which it is opposed. Jesus calls for an attitude towards the oppressor which will provoke the contempt of the world, and I sometimes wonder that the world has kept private shrines of reverence for His precepts when it has hustled them from the domain of common life. The policy at first succeeded beyond the most sanguine dreams. Christianity has always spread more rapidly when its advocates belonged to a subject-race compelled to conciliate, with no weapons to wield other than the methods of Jesus, rather than to a conquering power able to dictate terms. The religion of Jesus disseminates itself best as a long-suffering religion. This kind of non-resisting courage is not mean or ignoble. Mr Rudyard Kipling and his school never try to glorify it, but its practice needs more strength than the maddest battle-field, and its victories have been too splendid for stars and crosses to adorn. We owe our religion and all it does for us to the meekness of those who professed it in the early centuries.

These councils express Christ's belief in the accessibility of the human heart to the highest kinds of influence.

Had not the mailed Roman his better side? Jesus had the key which could sometimes unlock his pitiless grimness and let the revealing sunshine in upon wide

domains of unsuspected tenderness and faith. Is it not possible to end oppression by meeting it with meekness and benignity? The man who strikes an unprovoked blow, who sets himself to steal by the processes of law, who is the agent of an alien conqueror, who uses his power to enrich himself by irregular means may, after all, turn out to have a better side to his nature and respond to a new order of treatment and appeal. The history and the unhappy training of the wrong-doer call for pity. How often is he the victim of a vicious upbringing, warped by pernicious prejudices which were instilled into him when in his mother's arms, poisoned into malignity by harsh disabilities under which others have placed him, moving for years in circles swept clean, as by a devastating fire, of the finer affections! The greatest oppressors are often those who have themselves been oppressed in their youth, and who feel they have the right to take it out of somebody else when their turn comes round. That is human nature everywhere and at all times. The boy who has been made to fag at school thinks he has the right to kick younger boys and press them into his service. The clerk or warehouseman who has been bullied by an employer comes home at the end of a day to bully his household and straighten things after his own rude ways of thinking. The worst treated slave, unless divine grace takes hold of him, makes the most odious tyrant. Jesus Christ tried to make His disciples see that wrong was bred by an antecedent

wrong, and needed for its removal other treatment than that which it had received in the past. A new experiment in meekness and compassion, an approach to the hard embittered soul by untried paths, may arrest attention and effectually appeal to the better nature. Again and again it will be found to succeed, and in the final issue the man who has been buffeted and down-trodden will come out uppermost. In the brutalised, unblushing oppressor there are obscure elements of conscience and humanity to which the disciples may address themselves by a loftier quality of temper. And the results often justified these strange counsels of evangelism.

But in these instructions Jesus Christ was doing more than defining the lines of a policy to be followed by His disciples in their intercourse with the world. He was affirming for all time a principle which was to regulate their attitude towards each other and towards all men, a principle through which Christian character attains its noblest perfection, and Jesus is vindicated in all that He seeks to do for the sanctification of His people. These maxims are not the mere strategy of the propagandist, but the unwritten laws of a new spiritual life and consciousness.

Two thoughts which make this high counsel practicable suffuse the discourse of which it is a part.

Jesus tries to make His disciples feel that earthly wrong is but for a moment, and that they do well to hold the present with a light hand.

If shamefully struck by an assailant the blow would not sting for long, because side by side with the visible kingdom there was an invisible in which their names were enrolled and where their rights would be vindicated. Indeed, persecution for righteousness' sake was a condition in which they might do well to rejoice. The taking away of one garment or even two by the spoiler would soon be forgotten like the havoc of the moth. The service into which they might be thrust by the taskmaster who held the Roman scourge in his grasp meant but a few hours' additional weariness, and the memory of it would soon be slept away. The giving up of worldly substance to the need or to the greedy clamour of others would impose no enduring impoverishment. The disciples must learn to measure their rights by nobler standards than those in which the Gentile expressed his gains and losses. A new regime was at hand, and the running sores of mankind would be closed and healed. Jesus proclaimed it in the opening words of this discourse, as well as in the synagogue at Nazareth. Temporary disabilities would pass, perhaps even in the present life. The poor, the persecuted, the defamed, were inwardly blessed, honoured, comforted. The disciples must live in the realm of the spiritual, the realm ruled by a divine love which reversed and corrected the confusions of the visible order. Grand and open rectifications of undeserved pain and rankling inequality were in the air, and the harshness of their chafing, goaded lives was a basis of

high and fadeless renown. If it was not within the province of the Son to announce the day and the hour of His Advent to reign amongst men, the Eternal Righteousness at least would care severally for the disciples, and vindicate their cause. The life of contumely, spoliation, abasement was brief. The waiting for a satisfying, sufficient recompense should not be long. In obeying this new law, and submitting to obloquy, they would gain a status of surpassing sacredness, consciously becoming the sons of their Father in heaven, and making good the name before beholders. To copy God in patience, long-suffering, lavish kindness to thankless and undeserving men, was the method by which they would enter into the divine blessedness and make good their foothold in a family of light. Jesus Himself would show them the way of this new ethic, and bring them into full participation with Himself.

These poor disciples were not to be helpless pathfinders in pursuing this high ideal.

The incorporation with their Master to which they were destined would make this impracticable code easy to obey. Jesus follows up these startling counsels by speaking of the merciful and perfect Father, who sends rain and sunshine upon men of all types, with no grudging discrimination in His methods. And what the Father did in the realm of Nature He had come to do in the realms of the spirit life. In His service of others, in His death and mediatorial reign, He reflected the magnanimity of

the Father, for the secret had come to Him out of a divine and eternal fountain. In His life of humiliation and glory alike He met obduracy with tenderness, dishonour with meekness, insult with generosity and compassion. And through the mystery of redemption He conveys to His disciples the same secret, and brings them into community with the secret of His matchless work. His indwelling spirit makes them in due time capable of this unique ethical attainment. The chief difficulty is with the first step, but once resisting the flesh and surrendering the will and the life to a supreme guidance, we no longer count difficulties. When we are in living communion with Christ it is as easy to accept what the world calls a fantastic and extravagant rule of conduct as to accept a rule upheld by the cold sophisticated reason. Indeed, we cannot permanently believe in Christ's fulfilment of this transcendent law unless we try to fulfil it ourselves. All we need for this highest triumph of discipleship is to forget the old self and allow the new self to be suffused by His indwelling and all-empowering spirit. Jesus Himself is the forerunner into these new realms, and shows believers the way to the high perfection inculcated in His teaching and expressed in His own life.

Impracticable! we exclaim. The world could not go on for a single day if it were to follow this maxim. Which world do we mean? The world in which Jesus lives could not go on for a single day if this

maxim were set aside. In Paul's teaching to the Colossians the line of demarcation between the old and the new is boldly drawn. Whilst we set our affections on things below, it is of course impracticable. We can never learn the lesson in the market-place, on the battle-field, in our parliaments, in the council-chamber of earthly kings, in the realms of fashion. "Set your affections on things above." Live in the higher world with which you have been incorporated, and you will keep this hardest of the Master's sayings, and find the yoke easy and the burden light.

We do not speak of this obligation as though it were an easy thing for the natural man to fulfil.

He who has the most robust sense of rectitude, and feels profoundly the difference between right and wrong, is the man upon whom the requirement will press as a fretting and unreasonable burden. James and John did not rise to the precept till it had been enforced by the cross, for they wished to call down fire from heaven upon those who did not honour their Master. Peter struck with his sword at the servant of the high priest, and if we had been present, and had possessed Peter's courage and fiery zeal, our first impulse would have been to applaud and copy him. I am not sure how far Paul obeyed these counsels when he apostrophised the high priest as "a whited wall" whom God should smite. Perhaps he looked upon the high priest, as Jesus looked upon his predecessor in office, as a guilty sinner against light whose probation was all but spent. Certainly

there was scarcely the same room for patience and pity as towards the Pagan assailants whom Jesus had in mind in the Sermon on the Mount, and at whose hands He Himself at last suffered. But when Peter wrote his epistle he was saturated with the new spirit; John had mastered the secret, as may be shown from the writings of his old age; and Paul, although sometimes standing upon his civil rights, for the sake of others rather than his own, manifested this temper of forgiveness through his entire career, not only towards Gentiles but towards faithless Christian friends likewise. "I pray God that it may not be laid to their charge." We feel the difficulty to-day, especially when called upon to suffer at the hands of fellow-Christians. We can be patient towards benighted Gentiles, who deserve our pity much more easily. It is hard to keep from retaliation when blows are struck, and exorbitant demands made by those who profess to accept the ethic of Jesus. But we shall never rise unless we keep the Master's high standard in view. We need the law as a measure of our imperfection and the mark of our hope. "He that is perfect shall be as his master."

In the primitive centuries, when the first generations of Christians were harried by proud, cruel Pagan oppressors, these counsels of conciliation were a law of life. Resistance to evil would have been hopeless as David's exploits against lion and bear for a babe in its cradle. But the faith has grown and won an

assured place in the world, and the political conditions which lay within the Lord's immediate horizon have been completely reversed. Power has accrued to those who are nominally Christian, and the law and its ministers are on the side of the saints. The Pagan world is no longer able to treat the disciples of the Nazarene as it treated them at the beginning. How far are these principles still binding upon the community and the rulers who now represent it? If logically carried out, would not this section of the Sermon on the Mount make the punishment of crime impossible, and prove the negation of all government? An eloquent Anglican prelate some years ago declared that this maxim could not be carried into our courts of justice, or applied to social problems, and must be limited to private application.

But is the contradiction between Acts of Parliament and the command "Resist not him that is evil" so great as is assumed?

To punish crime when there has been a legitimate investiture for the work, is in its essence as gracious and merciful as the uncomplaining resignation of the early Christians when beaten by unbelieving neighbours or threatened with heathen law-courts. The judge who passes sentence upon a criminal does it in the public interest and not for personal ends. The obligation to turn the other cheek does not imply that we must turn our neighbour's cheek to the smiter when he is the victim, or look on at the looting of his wardrobe when his coat has been

seized. In this case the self-regarding problem drops out of the question, and is replaced by the duty of looking every man upon the things that are another's. When peace-making fails, it is a part of the mercy Jesus enjoined to protect the sufferer. And more than this, the crime may be punished in the interest of the criminal himself. The culprit sometimes deserves as much compassion as the oppressor of the primitive Christian, for in many cases he is a heathen by inheritance, by training, and by the unhappy circumstances of his lot. The law, alas! has too often been brutal and vindictive, but we are learning wisdom. The "First Offenders Act" is a tribute to the humanitarian creed of Jesus Christ. Our American kinsmen in some of their States are in advance of us, for they teach trades in their jails and convict prisons, provide libraries and reading-rooms, and allow the prisoners to earn money which is saved up for them against their discharge, so that they may make a new start in life. And the results justify the experiment. But after the utmost kindness there may be an irreclaimable residuum of evil-doers, and for such a residuum restraint is of the essence of mercy; perhaps, however, the residuum may not be so large as we suppose. Without committing ourselves to the views of those political dreamers who assert that law is needless, we yet hold that by wisdom, patience, and sympathy more will be achieved in the future than has been effected in the past. The peril of society often arises from the

unjustly punished criminal, who feels that he has never had a chance and to the end of his life is never likely to get a chance and who is maddened into indiscriminate malignities. In every generation Christianity has transmuted the dregs into fine gold, and will do it again. These counsels imply that Jesus had faith in the power of Christian meekness and love to redeem brutal, extortionate, and overbearing characters. Whilst constraining us to bring more of Christ's spirit into our laws, this principle, far from threatening the foundations of the State, only tends to strengthen them. The question is, after all, a theological question. Was man made in the image of God or in the image of the wolf? Is the divine image irrecoverable, or is the evil image imposed upon it an aberration only?

Such a principle as this, it is often argued, would undermine industry and disintegrate modern society into its primitive elements.

Competition is the mainspring of human progress, and yet Christ's precept seems to say, "Give up struggle and surrender to the unscrupulous spoiler." It is doubtful whether economic rivalries which quicken the wits of the few and so dull the brains of the overwrought many that they are incapable of conceiving new ideas, add much to the glory and upward movement of the race; but, at any rate, no thoughtful man will assume that modern commerce rests upon the best of all possible axioms. The chief problem of the hour is how to alleviate the

pressure of economic systems upon great sections of the population, and these not the industrial only. This is not the place either to uphold or condemn new proposals for the readjustment of the relations between capital, labour, and the community at large; but we must all agree that a better spirit needs to be introduced into our agriculture, our domestic occupations, our home and foreign trade.

This is admitted even by those who have profited most under the present methods of organising our trade and commerce. The men who have made themselves millionaires by pushing out rivals, do not feel that they have the right to keep their hoardings, and often give them back in glittering handfuls to the community. We are most of us familiar with the type of merchant who in business hours is a sleek, well-tailored pirate, and has few scruples in pushing his schemes of commercial expansion, but is munificent in private benefactions. The argument is thrust into our teeth again and again, that the higher civilisation rises, the more abject by contrast will be the condition of those low down in the scale, whose office it is to be hewers of wood and drawers of water. Neither art, science, nor applied mechanics, it is said, can advance without the immolation of many who are constitutionally unfit to move with the times. All material advancement makes the world relatively richer, and if some become relatively poorer, they have no one to blame but themselves. But are these things so? Conscientious thinkers agree that selfish

competition has been carried to lengths which are feverish, unreasonable, and inhumane. Capitalists are quick to recognise the fact in the interest of their own caste, and set themselves to syndicate shipping, coal, steel, and many other things ; but the design of these combinations is to restrict competition in favour of an elect few, rather than in favour of all classes alike. What is done for a limited number of the well-fed who are housed in villas and mansions, could surely be done for the ill-fed who are housed like rooks and foxes. If we can temper the wind to the shorn middle-class lamb, it ought not to be beyond our power to temper it for the worker who is flayed into rawness and chronic privation. The individual is helpless to improve things, and these urgent ameliorations must come through the collective action of the many. We can surely do as much as the beneficent trade-guilds of the Middle Ages which both in Europe and Asia often checked greed and ruthless rivalry. Many well-meant experiments to better things by industrial communism have failed. In some cases, perhaps, they were economically unsound. But experiments in the wilderness or in new Continents could not have altered the course of the old world any more than monastic forms of Christianity could evangelise empires lying in wickedness. Kinder and more humane principles must be engrafted upon our existing political economies. We must amend the societies in which we live, and permeate them with a better spirit. Jesus preached no detailed theories of government or

political economy, but He intended these counsels to dominate all departments of life.

The mill, the factory, and the exchange are commonly conducted upon the assumption that selfishness is a greater power in stimulating diligence and enterprise than the higher instincts of the human soul. But the world's progress is not entirely determined by coarse and animal motives. It is a libel upon the worker of every rank to speak of him as though he were a stranger to heroic and exalted motives. Many practise strict thrift, and toil like galley-slaves, so that they may not become burdens upon the care and strength of others. The keenest trader in the market often cares little or nothing for his own comfort, but thinks ever and always of his children and his home. His altruism is narrow, and needs to be widened out so as to take in other families than that of which he is the breadwinner; but it is a beginning. Much of the world's work is done for the mere joy of work, and it would be so in a yet greater degree if work were not unduly oppressive; much of it is done for the good of others and for the satisfaction of ministering to their needs; whilst it is obvious that some of it is done from sordid motives only. Emulation may operate as effectually in the sphere of good as in the sphere of evil. Men infect each other with the passion for getting and keeping, so disseminating the illusions of greed. But the spirit which looks every man upon the things of another may prove to be just as catching in the near

future. It misrepresents human nature and its possibilities to assume, with many of our political economists, that selfishness is the only lubricant which can keep the industrial and distributing machines from rust, and make them run sweetly. If the dull, sleepy, overwrought slaves of our civilisation were taught the art of thinking, and were allowed sufficient leisure for its exercise, invention would advance far more rapidly than in the past. Selfishness is not mightier than love, and Jesus did not believe that human nature was irreclaimably mean and self-centred. He was assured that the man who postured as an assailant, an extortioner, an audacious applicant for alms, was one in whom a nobler self might be evolved, and if His followers would only adopt His counsels they would effect the change before they had brought themselves either to the grave or to bankruptcy. The question when probed to its roots is not only ethical but theological likewise. Is man made in the image of God, and can the image be recovered in both the workman and his master? or must the wolf prevail?

How far should Christ's doctrine of non-resistance determine the policy of a Christian State upon the subject of war?

It is obvious that where this rule is revered, the crowned head of a nation ought not to declare war to avenge an insult offered either to himself or to one of his ministers. This maxim condemns in unfaltering accents wars waged in the financial interests of

particular classes, for the express purpose of extending empires or creating new markets. The Sermon on the Mount does not forbid a State which is guardian and representative of the oppressed from using force to end bloody misrule, and to put down international crime ; but such action should only be taken after the resources of patient argument and righteous appeal have been exhausted. Comparatively few wars, even in Christendom itself, have been entered upon from disinterested motives. Wars, even when ostensibly righteous, defeat their own ends, and will continue to do so till war is humanised to an extent we may think impossible. War assumes that the enemy is a demon without reason and conscience. Our Press often speaks as though the British were an elect race in possession of a promised land, and the rest of the world were peopled with Canaanites beyond the possibility of moral redemption. If the enemy does not obey the dictates of his higher nature in times of peace, he is less likely to do so after a frenzied war in which the innocent on both sides have been made to suffer for the guilty. Unless mankind is sinking into criminal and irremediable insanity, it will find better methods of suppressing international wrong-doing and lawlessness than the arbitrament of the sword. In the present day it is as much out of place as the old Saxon ordeal by fire. Jesus expected His own principles, whatever temporary upheaval they might bring, would make for that day of universal peace foretold by the prophets. Some modern wars have

been huge hypocrisies casting about for a show of decent motives, whilst at the core they were waged in a spirit of boastfulness, and to serve the exploiting capitalist and the slave-raider. Christians, it is well to remember, are not always unworthy of their Master. Within recent years two missionary societies in North-West China have refused to accept blood-money for their martyrs and in repayment of property destroyed by Boxers, and have given back the indemnity offered to found temples of healing and of Western science. Perhaps Jesus Christ would not care to identify Himself with Tolstoy, but He has more in common with that burning visionary than with statesmen who speak of war with pride, and laugh reckless defiance at neighbouring Powers. Is the man of British blood only made in the image of God, and are all other races made in the indelible image of the wolf?

We cannot exclude the average Christian community from the obligation to fulfil, in the many-sided questions with which it has to deal, this great and difficult precept. If cabinets and legislatures, pressmen, politicians, and time-serving preachers, did not scoff at it and discredit all attempts to apply it to complex problems, the Lord's word would be more loyally kept in the private lives of His followers. A community or a nation in its united strength ought to be better able to fulfil this hard saying than an isolated disciple. Societies are surely capable of greater things than their separate units. We shall

not recognise it as a personal duty to keep this commandment in all meekness and long-suffering till we put stress upon the corporate obligation. If the State may be Christian upon a lower ethical basis than that laid down in the Sermon on the Mount, why not the individual? To exempt any department of human affairs from the operation of this holy principle brings a sure penalty. If the State resists and retaliates, it robs these words of their high sanction, and justifies its subjects in living upon no higher level than that defined by Moses; and when vindictive resistance to wrong becomes the rule, we paralyse our faith in the forbearance and long-suffering of God, and make the entire Gospel unreal to the perceptions of the soul. We have to help our own power and the power of other men to grasp it by expressing its spirit in our lives. "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy."

CHRIST'S DOCTRINE OF THE
EXTRA

BY REV. FRANK BALLARD, M.A., B.D., B.Sc.

CHRIST'S DOCTRINE OF THE EXTRA

MATTHEW v. 43-48.

IT is customary to distinguish between various kinds of preaching as doctrinal, practical, and expository. But this Sermon on the Mount is sufficient witness that all preaching which is true to the mind of Christ is practical. For whether we agree with the late Archbishop of York or not, in regarding these three chapters of our first Gospel as an impracticable ideal, we must acknowledge that Christ's words here, however difficult in practice, are in perfect harmony with all His other teachings, inasmuch as they ignore all that is merely ornamental, in speech or thought, and manifestly insist upon practical goodness. The figures He employs are equally clear and forceful. "Salt" and "light" we all know to be most useful, most necessary. If only the characters and actions which they here represent were actually and always true throughout Christendom, there would be little room indeed to question the value of the Church to the world.

As things stand, however, we are compelled to ask, in regard to this "light," is it dawn, or noon, or dusk, with modern Christendom? Or, if we think of the Church as "the salt of the earth," are there not three possible cases? All the "savour" may be in the salt, so that it will be worth everything to the world. Or all the savour may be lost, in which case, according to Christ's own verdict, it will be "good for nothing." Or the savour may be partly lost and partly preserved, so that Christian influence will be in such case good for something, but by no means what it might be, or ought to be. That the last of these possibilities is represented in the actual facts, will be acknowledged by all unprejudiced observers. But as this cannot be considered satisfactory, it becomes all the more necessary to make perfectly clear what, from the ethical standpoint here adopted, really is the "savour" of the Christian salt, that is, the essential expectation and demand, as regards character and conduct, set forth here so firmly by the Founder of Christianity Himself. It needs not that we should despise or ignore the findings of Christian theology. But so long as these Gospels are taken to be an authentic record, the words of Christ Himself must be of supreme importance. However valuable may be the summaries of theologians, or even the teachings of Apostles, it is to the definite utterances of the Master Himself, such as we have before us here, that we are bound to give utmost heed.

The direct and emphatic personal pronouns through-

out this most important discourse are manifestly prospective. The real disciples of the Prophet of Nazareth had not yet emerged from the crowd of interested followers. But the proleptic "ye" of that time has become the "we" of to-day, weighty with the historic emphasis of the intervening ages. Whatever these great sayings of Jesus involve, there is nothing in history, philosophy, or criticism, to divert from modern Christianity the full force of their application.

Hence there are four things, at least, which merit our best attention: (1) The *à priori* reasonableness of this expectation from avowed Christian believers; (2) What such a demand really involves; (3) Its unmeasured importance; (4) The modern response to it.

I.

For many years I have ventured to urge that the literal rendering of these words is at once the most expressive and appropriate. "What *extra* do ye?" not only gives us idiomatic English for the Greek, but expresses in one word, which when apprehended is not likely to slip from the memory, the very core of Christ's ethical ideal. Moreover, it points us back with accurate emphasis to the preceding assertion in this discourse (v. 20), where also the great Teacher insists that the "kingdom of heaven" which He came

to inaugurate, rests not upon ordinary but upon exceeding goodness. Its foundation is the "extra" righteousness, not that to which His hearers were accustomed in the case of Jewish piety. For we have certainly no right to insert here any suggestion of hypocrisy, or anything other than devotion to the law, on the part of "the Scribes and Pharisees." In a word, it was an unequivocal demand for "extra" character that Jesus postulated as the *sine quâ non* of His discipleship. The passing of the centuries has done nothing to mitigate this claim. Rather does the question with which the Christ of the Gospels pressed home His demand for service in that day, become alike more weighty and more reasonable in our own time. "Yea, and why even of yourselves judge ye not what is right?" He said to His contemporaries. Such an expostulation appeals even more forcibly to the modern mind. For we have inevitably inherited a keener appreciation of the supernatural—that is the extra-natural — basis upon which Christianity rests, than has been present to the mind of any preceding age.

For let us here, at the outset, be perfectly clear. Christianity upon any merely natural basis is unthinkable. I am, of course, well aware of the labours of those who deem that they are doing service to the Christian cause by belittling miracles, and attenuating the supernatural in Christian fundamentals to its utmost minimum. Such efforts may be useful in some directions; far be it from us to scorn them. But the rejection of the miraculous

conception, and the physical resurrection, together with the adoption of a "triple tradition," and a Marcionised canon of the New Testament, by no means avail to naturalise the foundations of the Christian faith. For the reality of the supernatural underlies these quite as actually, even if not in the same fashion, as it does the creeds of ecclesiasticism. An able writer* has recently said, "The Church began without the creeds, and it has no more need of them to-day than in its first age." Such sentences are easily written to-day, but whatever we may think of creeds, the question to be fairly faced and unequivocally answered is, Did the Church begin and develop out of faith in a natural or a supernatural Christ? Is the Christ of the Gospels a merely natural son of man, or the extra-natural Son of God? That is the real matter to be settled, without evasion and without confusion, for every honest thinker. The least that can be said by way of reply is, that if the former alternative be adopted, then our Christian records cease to have any more historic value than nursery rhymes. It is well that those who to-day reject the supernatural Christ should cast scorn upon the historicity of the New Testament, seeing that the two must ever stand or fall together. For the reasons why, as sincere and careful students, we protest alike against the scorn and the rejection, I must be content to refer to other writings and occasions. Here it must

* J. B. in the *Christian World*.

suffice to affirm that there can be no question, so long as the world lasts, about the supernatural basis of the Christianity of the New Testament. Whatever the Christian belief that rests on these records may naturally have in common with other faiths, the "extra" elements, peculiar to itself, remain as plain as the daylight, and as undeniable.

Now the great bulk of ordinary Christians are far from denying this. Indeed, they are not seldom zealous to assert or to defend such an avowal. But almost as often they forget that a supernatural creed rightly and reasonably demands a supernatural life from those who profess it. "Unto whomsoever much is given, from him shall much be required." It can never be right or reasonable to affirm so much more than others in belief, and then exhibit no more than others in character and conduct. To lay the foundations of a palace and rear upon them a mere cottage, must involve an inconsistency equally manifest and indefensible. If but half be true of that which our Christian records assert concerning Christ, as to what He is, has been, has done, and has suffered "for us men and for our salvation," then we are bound by cords of reverent love and gratitude, to obligations and ideals measurelessly exceeding those which may satisfy others. In the minds and hearts of all who, in the Apostolic sense, "call Jesus Lord," there must ever echo this His question, "What extra do ye?" ye whose avowed belief is "extra" in comparison with all other creeds on earth!

II.

The reasonableness of such expectation, then, being admitted, let us proceed to ask what it really amounts to, as an ethical principle in practical human life. If it means that all Christians should be and do more than others, the inquiry immediately arising is—what do we find in others, how do they behave? The answer to such a query is of special import, because it is connected with a great practical fallacy which at one time was very influential and is only slowly being corrected, viz., that all the real goodness in the world is Christian. The Calvinism of former days did not scruple to teach that men were “moral corpses,” and that all who were “in the flesh,” that is unconverted, could not “please God,” in the sense that they could do nothing that was good at all. From this there issued too often in prayers, sermons, and homilies, the tragic travesty of truth involved in the assumption that all men outside the Church were bad characters, that is, devoid of goodness. How false this is to fact, any honest eyes can see every day, on every hand. That “all have sinned,” and are yet sinful in the sight of God, is true, but not more true than that myriads of those who, alas! are not found worshipping with us, nor pledged to Christian ideals, are nevertheless diligent, truthful, honest,

virtuous, sincere, affectionate, and sometimes even nobly unselfish. It were as wicked as vain to deny this. The religion which had to start by a manifestly false assumption, would assuredly deserve to be scorned of men no less than disowned of God.

Christ Himself never gave occasion for such a fallacy. He ever acknowledged goodness to be good, even in its most elementary forms, quite as frankly as He insisted upon the sinfulness of sin. That which He made too clear for any possible misapprehension was that all such goodness, in contact with the forces of evil in human nature, was not good enough—either to set up a kingdom of heaven upon earth, or give valid hope of any real blessedness hereafter. According to the Christian estimate, therefore, there are three grades of goodness which have ever to be kept as distinct in thought as they are in fact, viz., natural goodness, Old Covenant righteousness, and New Covenant holiness.

(1) As to the first of these, we need say little here beyond acknowledging its reality and pointing to its true source. It is often strangely ignored, indeed, in the name of religion. Yet it ought not to be. For as in the physical world the mystery of painlessness is ever greater by far than the mystery of pain, so in the realm of human character and conduct, the mystery of moral good is immeasurably greater than the mystery of evil. The actual facts of our

modern civilisation—to those acquainted with them at first hand — overwhelmingly demonstrate this, in spite of all the tragedy of our drunkenness and crime, our hooliganism and prostitution. And what is more, this universally diffused goodness is essentially, even though unconsciously, Godness—derived from and related to God. So long as we rightly hold a “primeval nebulosity,” to be unthinkable without God, we are equally permitted and compelled to avow that, in so far as human nature is evolving upwards from lowliest beginnings, morally as well as physically, it is in accordance with the divine plan. It is the Divine Will which has ordained that such goodness should be not only possible, but the expression, at least in part, of itself.

(2) The training of the Jewish people under the Old Covenant represents, with all its difficulties from our Christian standpoint, the introduction of a higher stage. For here the goodness tends increasingly to become, first, conscious of its source, and then reciprocative. We see the same process by analogy in our own homes. For, however good a favourite dog or horse may be, the dawning love of the youngest child is unquestionably higher, in that it knows more and more what parental love means, and is increasingly enabled to appreciate and reciprocate with thought and will. So is the righteousness of the Old Testament higher than natural goodness, in acknowledging its dependence upon God as the fount of all goodness, in feeling its need, need of forgiveness for wrong, in its

gratitude for all blessings, and its desire to reach an ideal of character which is as far above the merely natural standard as it is below that of Jesus Christ. Both the excellence and the failure of this Old Covenant righteousness are shown plainly in the Psalms, some portions of which are so deep and high, so true and tender, as to serve helpfully in Christian worship, whilst other portions have no place in Christian thought or speech, but must be abhorrent to the hearts of truly Christian disciples.

(3) The last and highest ideal of human goodness is that which Christ came to bring to pass on earth, and of which He Himself is for ever the consummate example no less than teacher. As Judaistic goodness begins where natural goodness ends, viz., with the recognition of God in all His holiness and majesty, so Christian goodness begins where the Judaistic ends, viz., with that further development of the knowledge of God and consequent ennoblement of human character which are made possible through the revelation of the divine as it comes to us in Christ. Whilst, therefore, the Judaistic ideal was "extra" to that of the natural man, the Christian is "extra" to that of the Old Covenant. No words can express this more plainly than those of the chapter before us. Again and again we are told, "It was said in old time"—and it is to be observed that the references are both to what is included in the "Ten Commandments" and what is not—"But I say unto you"—do more than this, even the "extra" which so manifestly

transcends the old. How this same conception permeates the whole of Christ's teachings, and is taken up with reaffirmation and appeal by the Apostles in all their writings and labours, must be left here without actual quotation, seeing that every one who will can at any time verify it for himself.

III.

It will be more to our purpose now to glance at the vast import of this simple but significant principle, as applied to our present-day environment. And that in four main directions:—

(i) *No familiarity with Christian terms or glamour of religious convention can mitigate the fact that this is the definite "law of Christ."*

Deep mysteries may enshroud His person, and problems insoluble associate themselves with His nature, life, and works. But here is something unequivocally clear, viz., His own expectation from all who bear His name. Truly any man who will may reject Christ. But no man can accept Him as Master, and refuse His standard of obedience. The old Methodist "Covenant Service" expressed this as felicitously as truthfully—"Do not think of coming to Christ and compounding or making your own terms with Him; that will never be allowed you." For it is but a faithful echo of the Evangelist's report, that "He said to all, If any man be willing to come after Me, let

him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow Me."

(ii) *To any one who so wills it is easy enough, without either mysticism or fanaticism, to determine continually where the "extra" comes in, day by day.*

The remarkable chapter in *Ecce Homo* entitled "The Enthusiasm of Humanity" has deservedly become a Christian classic, so far as the general exposition of this principle is concerned. "This *higher-toned goodness* which we call holiness" is indeed a never-to-be-forgotten summary. The "higher tone" is manifest in that such goodness "not only abstains from vice, but regards even a vicious thought with horror." But simply and actually, every hour of the day, even a child knows what self-denial means, and what is required to constitute Christ's "extra," that is, goodness beyond the natural. To cite only two typical instances from the New Testament*—"For what glory is it, if when ye are punished for faults ye take it patiently?"—there is no "extra" in such a case—"Do not even the publicans the same!"—"But if when ye do well and suffer for it, ye shall take it patiently, this is acceptable with God"—for it does involve the "extra" of which Jesus spoke, and is beyond natural and Judaistic goodness alike, even as it is generally beyond Christian practice. Or again,† "To

* 1 Peter ii. 19-20; 1 Corinthians vi. 5-7.

† Quoting from Dr Weymouth's excellent *New Testament in Modern Speech*, which ought to be in the hands of every thoughtful modern Christian.

say no more, then, it is altogether a defect in you that you have lawsuits with one another. Why not rather endure injustice? Why not rather submit to being defrauded?" That certainly would be the "extra"—for it is not only beyond natural goodness and Old Testament righteousness, but simply ignored in the actual proceedings of nine-tenths of conventional Christianity, as well as throughout civilisation. Take, however, two more instances, this time from ecclesiastical life. Macaulay, writing in reference to the Bloody Assize, says:—

"The chief friend of these unhappy men was one who abhorred their religious and political opinions, one whose order they hated, to whom they had done unprovoked wrong, Bishop Ken. That good prelate used all his influence to soften the jailors, and retrenched from his own episcopal estate, that he might be able to make some additions to the coarse and scanty fare of those who had defaced his beloved cathedral. His conduct on this occasion was of a piece with his whole life."

More recently the following has appeared in print:—

"For some time past, the superintendent of the Canterbury Wesleyan Methodist Circuit had considerable difficulty in securing the freehold of an eligible site in that Cathedral City, from the Ecclesiastical Commissioners. After five months fruitless negotiations, he determined to avail himself of the Archbishop's stay in Canterbury to solicit his aid in the matter. Accordingly he did so, with the result that immediately on Dr Temple's return to London, the freehold of the site was granted."

O si sic omnes! Put such facts as these side by side with the utterances of "High Church" journals, or the fratricidal war waged over an Education Act, and is there room for a moment's hesitation as to which is according to the mind of Him whom Christendom so often calls "Master and Lord."

Thus (iii) *it is time to say, without hesitation or evasion, that here and here only is the "savour" of the salt.*

Such response to Christ's demand for the "extra" is that which alone constitutes the proof of true Christianness, and the only right to the Christian name. Not one whit too strongly did John Wesley say—

"Are Christians any better than other men? Are they better than Mohammedans or heathens? To say the truth, it is well if they are not worse—in many respects they are abundantly worse. But then, of course, they are not properly Christians. The generality of those that bear the Christian name do not know what Christianity is."

And even the gentle and broad-minded F. W. Maurice was led to avow that—

"Nothing is more common than to meet people who emphatically describe themselves as Christians, and talk about Christianity. Nothing is more rare than men who in their decisions and acts are guided by the Christian spirit."

These witnesses are only too true. So comes it, alas! to pass that the name Christian which should

be, above all others, sacred and influential, means often practically nothing, and the Christianity which should be "the salt of the earth, and the light of the world," does comparatively little to enlighten or to purify. Never was it more necessary than now to ask plainly, What really constitutes a Christian? And with equal plainness to reply, Not creeds, for any hypocrite can avow a creed: not orthodoxy, for, as James reminds us, devils also are orthodox and shudder. Not names, or conventions, or ecclesiastical formulæ, or evangelical shibboleths, for all these are but human superficialities and superfluities. None of these is the "savour" of the salt, but simple *excess of goodness*, even the incarnation of the "extra" in a "holiness" which is really "higher-toned goodness." Christian goodness only begins when it exceeds. When for Christ's sake a man or woman does or bears that which neither nature nor Judaism could demand or expect, then, and then only, have they right to the Christian name.

(iv) *So we see that here is the supreme raison d'être and mission of the Gospel in this world, viz., to develop a type of character otherwise impossible, and so cure evils and promote ameliorations which nothing else can accomplish.*

Eschatology has confessedly loomed too large in the programme of the churches. It is being corrected none too soon. But when Darwin declared that man can do his duty without God, and when journalism asserts that man can be good without the Gospel, it is

sufficient here to reply—without challenging the unproved assumptions involved—that all depends upon what it is to be good, and upon what duty includes. A dog in a sense can do its duty to its master, as a horse can be good at pulling up a hill. But until it is proved that the son or daughter in our own home is no better than a quadruped, assuredly his or her duty and devotion will be something more than these can do, and will be measured by the highest, not the lowest, relationship. Christ's call to duty is as to the children of the Most High. How insufficient is the ordinary sense of duty, or the natural type of goodness, for the guidance and control of human nature, all past history and present civilisation combine to testify. They cannot reckon with the passion which wrecks humanity. Science can doubtless teach men to be healthy, education can develop intellect, law and conscience combined can tend to the evolution of morality, but the condition of the world to-day is witness that more than these is as much needed to make the present life worth living for all men, as to emphasise the hope of further life to come.

Here, then, is the need for the Christian holiness which involves an ideal of character beyond morality, and beyond Judaism, even such as is embodied in Christ's interpretation of the two great commands—or, as expressed here, consists in being "complete in goodness as your Heavenly Father is complete." It is for the incarnation of such holiness in the Church that the world is waiting, and it is concerning such

"extra" goodness in Christian discipleship, that Christ declares, "If the salt has lost its savour it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out and trodden under foot of men."

IV.

It may well seem to a sincere heart that comparison of all the actualities of our modern religious life, both individual and social, with such a character-ideal as is here involved, is depressing almost to despair. We will conclude, therefore, with one or two brief suggestions to the contrary.

Certainly the words of *Ecce Homo* are well-warranted, and deserve to be quoted once more:—

"No man will deny that this higher-toned goodness which we call holiness has existed. Few will maintain that it has been exceedingly rare. Perhaps the truth is that there has not been a town in any country since the time of Christ, in which a century has passed without exhibiting a character of such elevation that his mere presence has shamed the bad and made the good better, and has been felt at times like the presence of God Himself. And if this be so, has Christ failed, or can Christianity die?"

The answer to this last query assuredly rests neither with God nor with "sinners," but with Christians who ought to be, even if they are not, "saints." The saintship which involves the "extra" is confessedly difficult to human nature. The service

it demands can never be other than costly. Yet is not the highest degree also costly in everything that is worth doing, throughout our whole life sphere? Is the best in science or art, in politics or commerce, to be attained without effort. Nay! when we think of it truly, is not the difficulty of Christian holiness the very essence of its disciplinary benediction?

Moreover, such an ideal is not impossible. Rightly did Edna Lyall say, "No impossible order is ever given except by bad generals." Besides which, as undeniable fact, it has been exhibited by "a multitude that no man could number," perhaps not as flagrantly as poppies show themselves in a cornfield, but as actually and as fragrantly as violets are found in a spring hedgerow. Myriads of devoted men and women have echoed the Apostolic avowal, "I have found the secret—I can do all things in Him that strengtheneth me."

Surely, too, it is the most honourable calling—the most noble effort—open to human nature. For it means constant co-operation with God for the good of all men. The greatest blessedness of the greatest number becomes, in this case, the inevitable aim of every Christian man and every Christian Church, and constitutes at once the worthiest philanthropy and the highest humanitarianism. Moreover, the continual following of such a standard amounts in the ultimate to the utmost possible contribution of any Christian life towards the genuine amelioration of human society—whether that life be prominent or

private, famous or unknown. But for such testimony in fact and deed assuredly no preaching would have availed to establish primitive Christianity in its bitterly opposing environment. Nor can there be the slightest doubt, to those who read the signs of the times, that without such substantiation in life and character, the Christian creed will become of less and less account with every decade of the present century.

Above all, we have to bear in mind, for our comfort and inspiring, that genuine obedience to Christ's doctrine of the "extra" is ever a matter of quality of heart rather than quantity of occasion. "He that is faithful in a very little is faithful also in much." The "higher-toned" goodness is necessarily rooted in our deepest thought and feeling, and these express themselves most actually and most utterly in the smallest events, the words, the moods, the looks, as well as actions, of every passing hour.

It is not so long since the modern superficial world was fascinated by the question, "Are you a mason?" and its dramatic possibilities of answer by signs and tokens. But the question, "Are you a Christian?" is of far greater import for every individual as well as for all humanity. And it is answered not by deeds and words alone, but often without either, even by silent radiation of character. "Abide in Me and I in you," said the same Christ who bids us exhibit the "extra." It is not the truth to term this mysticism. It is rather the simplest expression

that words can formulate of that co-operation of the living Master with the loving disciple, which language can never adequately convey. But it comes in the end to this, that the clearest, best, and strongest proof of true Christianness is the constant though indescribable outshining of the "extra," which is, after all, as easy to those who truly "abide in Him" as it is to the electric lamp to glow when the current is passing through it. "So," He Himself for ever says, "shall ye be My disciples."

THE CURE OF OSTENTATION

BY REV. A. ROWLAND, D.D., LL.B., B.A.

THE CURE OF OSTENTATION

“Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them : otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven,” etc.—MATTHEW vi. 1-4.

IN considering this passage, it must be remembered that when Jesus spoke of secrecy as a cure for ostentation, He did not teach us to keep our religion to ourselves, as if it were a matter solely between ourselves and Him. What He here condemns is seeking for publicity with a view to being well thought of by men. He is concerned not with the act but with the motive. Publicity and privacy are, in themselves, of little consequence one way or another, if only the act is done with singleness of heart as unto the Lord. In the preceding chapter, our Lord tells us that we are to be like a city set on a hill, which is conspicuous enough for men to see even from a distance. He further urges us not to put our light under a bushel, but to let it shine before men that they may see our good works and glorify our Father in heaven. There is a witness-bearing, therefore, which he very distinctly calls for, and we are not to pervert His teaching in this passage into a veil for our niggardliness, or into an

excuse for moral cowardice. It is when the purpose of publicity is to attract attention to ourselves, and to win praise from men, that we need the word of warning, "Take heed that ye do not your righteousness before men to be seen of them."

The distinction between what is approved and forbidden is easily illustrated. Suppose a girl is singularly beautiful and winsome, unconsciously attracting the admiration of those about her, she may still be, and often is, as simple-hearted as her less-favoured sister, and may thank God for the gifts which increase her influence and her responsibility. But if her dress and conduct are studied always with a view to effect, and she is constantly asking herself whether she looks well and whether she is admired, her character will be spoiled by her vanity. Similarly with mental gifts. A young fellow with exceptional ability ought to come to the front. In the movements of his time he is meant to be a leader of others—admired, trusted. But if he lives for popularity, undertaking only what will bring him praise, and avoiding what will bring him blame, if the atmosphere of public applause is the very breath of his life, then he fails in fitness for higher honour. This spirit is what Jesus is condemning here, in its relation to the activities of a religious life. "To be seen of men" in the sense of being known as a Christian, is your duty; "to be seen of men" as the motive of your seeming to be what you are not, is your danger, about which Jesus says, "Take heed."

I.

You see, then, the motive against which we are warned is the wish to please men where we ought to be seeking simply to please God.

As a motive of moral conduct it is inadequate, for it will not always hold good. If a son keeps straight merely because he wishes to please those at home, when the time comes for him to go out into the world he will probably make up for previous restraint by freer indulgence. There are scenes into which no home influence is able to reach. There are passions which regard for the opinions of others is powerless to restrain, as were the withes and cords to hold Samson when he was aroused. Any one occupies a very perilous position who has no other restraint than that.

Besides, the opinion of men is untrustworthy in morals and in religion. You may move into a set where a course of conduct is approved which those at home condemn, and then the public opinion which once restrained you from evil, may be transformed into an impulse which will drive you into evil. Too often those who have failed to take heed as their Lord bade them do, have, in changing their environment, put off with it the semblance of religion, and perhaps even the restraint of morality. They are like

the chameleon which, it is said, can change its colour according to the colour which is nearest. Paul had good reason to say, "If I yet pleased men, I should not be a servant of Jesus Christ." We must beware of putting man in the place of God as a motive either in thought or in conduct.

II.

The subtle nature of this temptation is easily seen.

Even the early disciples, in the first flush of their religious enthusiasm, needed the warning word, "Take heed," lest they should come at last under the stern condemnation uttered by the same lips against those who yielded to the power of this temptation, "Woe unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites." The beginnings of this sin are hardly perceptible. Temptation to it assails not least powerfully those who already have a reputation for being religious men. It is not at all difficult to imitate such religious virtues as are mentioned here. If a man professes to be honest when he is not, he will soon be found out; but if a man professes to be devout, he may escape detection more easily and far longer. Because honesty and all ordinary moralities have obvious tests, whereas piety has not, and the outward signs of religion, such as

almsgiving, prayers and fasting, can be assumed without difficulty by any man who has a purpose for assuming them.

And if one is really religious, even he must constantly be on his guard against this formidable temptation to unreality. He may have begun Christian work with a right motive, but if he is commended in conversation or in the religious press, very soon the subtle flattery begins to work, until he cannot easily help thinking what other people will say, if he does this or that. And while he continues the old work and attends the old services, gradually the lower motive may overpower the higher, until at last he wakes to the consciousness that he is being kept up to his religious duties by the thought of what others expect of him. This motive is the more natural because we see our fellow-men, and they force their opinions about us upon our notice. Whereas God dwells in the secret place, and it is only through faith that we know He is near, that He concerns Himself about us, and that at last we must give an account unto Him. We may well put up the prayer, "Search me, O God, and know my heart, try me and know my thoughts, and see if there be any wicked way in me ; and lead me in the way everlasting."

III.

The sinfulness of the motive no one can doubt, for it is hypocrisy, and this Christ condemned more vigorously than any other sin.

He called it the "leaven of the Pharisees," so swiftly does it spread, and so subtly does it work. Slow in its beginning, it is fatal in its end. Just a little insincerity creeps in at first—a wish to please men rather than God, and a desire to be thought holier than we really are ; but oh, how it spreads, till the heart is corrupted. The false professor may still stand firm amongst many trees of the Lord's planting, seemingly as vigorous in life as they, but when the tree falls under the axe of death the heart is seen to be rotten, only fit for the burning. May God save us all from that fatal self-destruction. The more public the nature of our work, the more need there is for us and for others on our behalf to put up that prayer.

The world has often condemned unreality among religious men. Fiction and caricature have depicted to our loathing Stiggins and Uriah Heap. But with far greater courage did our Lord warn us against the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy, and with more burning zeal did He urge us always to be sincere and whole-hearted. There are certain minerals which exhibit different colours on their different faces. In a

piece of iolite, for example, you may see sometimes a deep blue along its vertical axis, while it is brownish on the side perpendicular to that axis. It depends, of course, on the way in which the particles of the mineral are arranged for reflecting and transmitting light, and if you would have the same colour on all its faces, the whole internal structure must be changed. This dichroism, this double-facedness, exists in the moral world and in the religious world, and to cure it Jesus calls for a radical change of nature, for a substitution of God in the place of man among the motives which rule us.

IV.

Let us think of the motive suggested, for it is different from that suggested by ordinary moralists.

There are plenty of people who condemn, as Jesus does here, those who think too much of public opinion. They urge that, as high-minded men, we ought not to court vulgar applause, that we should rather care for the approval of conscience, or for the love of virtue, or for the welfare of the people. Well, Jesus cared for all these things far more than any of us care, but above them all He exalted this motive, that we should constantly act as in the presence of our Heavenly

Father, who sees in secret. Every word of that description is weighty. God is our *Heavenly* Father, infinitely above the reach of all human conceptions, caring for the inward which is eternal, rather than for the outward which is temporal ; yet He is our *Father*, caring for us, yearning over us and over those whom we influence for good or for evil. Conduct ruled by thought of Him is far different from and higher than the shallow utilitarian morality which finds its whole basis in humanity, and disregards the very existence of God. And it was Christ, the Revealer of the Father, the Incarnation of the Father, who brought down into the earthly sphere this heavenly and everlasting motive power which can always and everywhere impel us to the life of righteousness.

If it be said that Jesus appeals here to the hope of reward, and that this, after all, is a low motive of appeal to innate conscience, I would remind you of the nature of God's rewards. They are not arbitrary blessings affixed to such and such acts, but they are the outcome of character, the result of moral fitness, given to those for whom they are prepared, and who, by His grace, are prepared for them.

Almsgiving is suggested by our Lord as an example of His meaning. He was speaking to men whose national customs and whose religious worship were saturated with consideration for the poor. When greed and covetousness asserted themselves, the prophets denounced the transgressors unsparingly, defending the rights of the poor as courageously as

they asserted the claims of Jehovah. Boxes for alms stood in rows in the Temple court, and every Sabbath day in the Synagogue an offertory was taken for the destitute. This custom brought its temptations. Sometimes a wealthy Pharisee would stand at the door and scatter largesse among the beggars. There was need, then, as there is need now, that Jesus should teach the people that the mere act of giving money had no great virtue in it, that it was only approved by God when it was the result of pity for man or of love to Him. Those who give for the sake of praise from men have their reward, He said, and with the sound of applause the good in their act dies away.

Jesus enormously enlarged the area of benevolence, and almsgiving forms only a small part of it now. He Himself did good, not by large contributions of money, which few can afford, but by personal service which is possible to the poor and to the children. On two occasions He fed the hungry, but He more frequently restored health to those who were infirm or ill, that they might henceforth earn their own bread, and when He gave anything material it was in the simplest form, such as barley bread on the hillside. In ways hardly recognised we may follow Christ in this. We may use medical or surgical skill, by means of which health may be restored. We may look after the outcasts, and give new hope and new opportunity to those throwing up effort in despair. We may check the awful waste of earnings which flows through the great leakage of the drink traffic, and

may thus save many from pauperism. We may mould public opinion until profits are more fairly divided between capitalists and producers. All such work may be linked with God, may be done so as to glorify Him, and for all faithful service the reward is sure.

In regard to all such benevolence, Christ says, in effect, "While you do this, do it with a view to please your Father who seeth in secret, and not because men heed you or praise you. When thou doest alms let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth, that thine alms may be in secret." If we have a bias towards ostentation, if we are inwardly conscious that we are affected in our giving by the fear or by the favour of men, then we should keep quite secret what we do. Further, in some popular methods for raising money for charitable objects, we see disregard of our Lord's teaching, for they sometimes appeal to vanity or ambition. We do not say that lists of subscriptions should not be printed, for our Lord is referring to our duty in regard to our own gifts, and not to the obligations of those to whom such gifts are entrusted. There may even be a legitimate appeal to emulation, for Paul used the example of the poor Christians in Macedonia to provoke the liberality of the richer people in Corinth.

The one main lesson taught us is that God is our Judge, that He knows all about our circumstances, that He decides fairly in regard to what we do or leave undone, and it is to Him that we stand or fall.

Let us rejoice to know that He is more than our Master, He is our Father, and the Father of those around us; and because they are His children they are our brothers, so that if in any way we can help them we are to do so for His sake, without ostentation or patronage, as good stewards of God's manifold grace, who make these words their own:

“We give Thee but Thine own,
Whate'er the gift may be;
For all we have is Thine alone,
A trust, O Lord, from Thee.”

THE TRUE NATURE OF PRAYER

BY REV. GEORGE MILLIGAN, B.D.

THE TRUE NATURE OF PRAYER

“Be not ye therefore like unto them: for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask Him.”—
MATTHEW vi. 5-8.

THE whole of the chapter from which this passage is taken is occupied with the subject of Christian Righteousness. In opposition to the Pharisees, who were too apt to think only of a righteousness that might be won by human efforts, and that sought human praise, our Lord teaches that the true righteousness, the righteousness of the members of His kingdom, looks throughout to God. “Take heed,” so He expressly says, speaking of righteousness generally, “that ye do not your righteousness before men, to be seen of them: else ye have no reward with your Father which is in heaven” (verse 1, r.v.). And then, having laid down this general principle, He at once proceeds to apply it in the three special directions of Almsgiving, of Prayer, and of Fasting.

It is with the second only of these great duties that we are at present concerned, and in the verses before us we find our Lord warning His followers against three very common errors into which in their

prayers men are apt to fall. We have a warning against *ostentatious*, against *formal*, and against *mis-trustful* prayer.

I.

We have a warning against *ostentatious* prayer.

“When ye pray, ye shall not be as the hypocrites : for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men.”

It was the Pharisees, as we have already seen, that our Lord had specially in view when He spoke these words. They had reduced their religious life largely to a system—to the careful avoidance of certain acts, which they were very ready to condemn in other men, and to the regular performance of certain outward religious duties to which they attached the highest value. And amongst these last, public prayer occupied a large place. Daily at certain fixed hours they were in the habit of betaking themselves to the Synagogue, in order to repeat their prescribed forms of prayer. And if by any chance the hour of prayer surprised them in the open street, they did not hesitate there and then to engage in their devotions ; not very sorry, if report be correct, for the opportunity of displaying thus still more publicly their piety to the passers-by. We must not, of course, for a moment imagine that this was the

case with all the Pharisees. There were doubtless many earnest and anxious men amongst them, whose zeal might well put our lukewarmness to shame. But at the same time we cannot fail to notice how readily such practices as we have been speaking of would lend themselves to vain-glorious display on the part of those who were so minded. To be seen of men to pray would come to be more thought of than to pray itself: and the outward act would be used to cloak over and disguise the real state of the heart and life.

It may be said that such abuses would be no longer tolerated amongst us. And, indeed, at first sight our danger would seem to lie rather in the opposite direction, not in the too great publicity, but in the too great privacy of our religious life. Men are more inclined nowadays to be ashamed of, rather than to glory in, their prayers, and to pride themselves on the looseness with which they sit to outward rites rather than on the punctilious observance of them.

At the same time, when we look closely at it, the old Pharisaic error may still be found lurking in strange ways in our midst. For what really lay at the root of all this ostentatious display and vain-glory was clearly the feeling that a certain merit attached to the act of prayer in itself. It was a good deed, so the Pharisees thought, reflecting credit on the man who engaged in it, and securing for him, in consequence, the divine approbation and reward. And therefore it was in order to combat this false view of

prayer, and to lead men to think of it, not as a substitute for God's grace, but as the means through which that grace might be appropriated and enjoyed, that Jesus exhorted His disciples, when they prayed, to enter into their closet, and when they had shut the door, to pray to their Father which was in secret, and their Father which saw in secret would recompense them.

Nor should it be different with us. There is nothing, it need hardly be pointed out, in our Lord's words to exclude rightly-ordered family, or social, or congregational prayer in its proper place and time. And we can all testify to the help which in various ways we have received from these ordinances. At the same time, we must see to it that we do not let the more public acts of our faith tend in any way to obscure the personal bond between the soul and God, which lies at the back of all true religion, and which it is the special function of secret prayer to foster. It is when we are most alone with God that we can most fully realise our dependence upon Him, and His Fatherly care for us, and enter into the deep meaning of the great words of the old Latin Father:* "Thou hast made us, O God, for Thyself: and our hearts are restless till they rest in Thee." And, therefore, amidst the distractions and pleasures of our daily lives we cannot too jealously guard those quiet moments, whether they come to us in the privacy of our own chambers, or meditating, like Isaac in the fields at even-

* St Augustine.

tide, when in simple, loving communing we can "acquaint ourselves with God and be at peace" (*cf.* Job xxii. 21).

"Prayer is the soul's sincere desire,
Uttered, or unexpressed ;
The motion of a hidden fire
That trembles in the breast.

"Prayer is the burthen of a sigh,
The falling of a tear,
The upward glancing of the eye
When none but God is near."

II.

We have a warning against *formal* prayer.

"And in praying use not vain repetitions, as the Gentiles do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking. Be not therefore like unto them."

This error is closely connected with the one we have been considering; for, so long as men think that there is any merit attached to their prayers, so long will they be tempted by their mere multiplication and repetition to seek for themselves a greater reward. Is it not this feeling, for example, that leads the poor Buddhist not only to mutter again and again the same dreary monotone of words, but actually to inscribe them on the fans of a mill or praying-machine, under the belief that prayer is being offered if the mill be driven round by wind or

wave? Or, to appeal to less extreme instances that come before us in the pages of Scripture, what but the notion that their gods were gods who could be wrought upon, and almost pestered into compliance, caused the Phœnician priests of Baal to call from morning even until noon, "O, Baal, hear us" (1 Kings xviii. 26), or the Ephesian worshippers of the Greek Diana to continue shouting 'about the space of two hours, "Great is Diana of the Ephesians" (Acts xix. 34)?

It may again be urged that we are far removed from the possibility of conduct such as that. And yet, what is it but a feeling springing from closely allied motives that leads Christians day after day to repeat—shall I say sometimes to mumble over—the same words of prayer, as if their mere repetition were enough, or as if God were likely to pay much heed to words from which the mind and the heart and the will of the worshipper were alike absent? No! it requires the active exercise of all these, the dedication of the whole man, the praying with what the Apostles call "the spirit" and with "the understanding also" (1 Cor. xiv. 15), if our prayers are to be truly acceptable in the sight of God. And the more clearly we realise the infinite character of Him with whom we have to do, the more convinced we must be of the need of absolute sincerity in our approach to Him. Prayer is indeed what a recent writer * happily calls "a unique school of sincerity,"

* J. R. Illingworth.

in contrast to the "sweet illusion" in which worshippers are so often represented as lingering.

"God is in heaven, and thou upon earth: therefore let thy words be few" (Eccles. v. 2). And it is out of the abundance of the heart, and not of the lips, that the mouth should speak (*cf.* Matt. xii. 34). It was with three words that St Peter implored his Lord's aid when he felt himself beginning to sink in the stormy waters: "Lord, save me" (Matt. xiv. 30). It was with seven words that the poor publican uttered that cry for pardon, which has found an answering echo in so many hearts: "God be merciful to me a sinner" (Luke xviii. 13). It was with nine words that the penitent thief on the cross received the promise of future blessedness: "Jesus, remember me when Thou comest in Thy kingdom" (Luke xxiii. 42). And so always, when the heart is deeply stirred, it does not indulge in vague generalities or rhetorical phrases, but makes its wants known in the shortest, simplest, and most direct terms. What we require is, first of all, to be quite clear in our own minds as to what we really need, to know "every man the plague of his own heart," and then in no "vain repetitions," but in humble dependence upon the divine promises of aid, the old prayer will still in spirit ascend to God: "Hear Thou in heaven Thy dwelling place, and forgive, and do, and give to every man according to his ways, whose heart Thou knowest; for Thou, even Thou only, knowest the

hearts of all the children of men" (1 Kings viii. 39).

III.

For, lastly, we have a warning against *mistrustful* prayer.

"For your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask Him."

True prayer rests not, as so many are tempted to imagine, upon God's ignorance, but upon God's knowledge of us. We do not pray to inform God, or to correct His methods with us, for He knows what is good for us far better than we know ourselves.

But if so, it may be at once objected, what is the good of praying at all? Will not God supply all our wants without any effort on our part?

But so to argue is wholly to misunderstand the nature of God's dealings with us. God's best gifts are always imparted in answer to a certain readiness and willingness on the part of men to receive them. And just as the earthly parent looks for a response on the part of the child for whom he is doing his best, so our Father in heaven loves to be asked, and misses, when He does not receive them, our "little human" prayers.

Nor must we ever forget that petition and

supplication are after all only a very small part of prayer. Prayer in its essence is rather the drawing near of the human heart to God, the intercourse of our spirits with His Spirit, the talking with God as a man talks with his friend. And as such, it is not so much the means of acquiring God's gifts, as of educating and preparing us for enjoying the blessings He is so ready to bestow. Or, to borrow a very simple illustration,* the man in the boat who with his hook takes hold of the shore, does not thereby pull the shore to the boat, but the boat to the shore. And so in prayer we do not draw the mercy to ourselves, but ourselves to the mercy. The shore is ready for the boatman's hook. God is able and ready to help us.

In this confidence, then, let us seek to pray. Let not God's infinite distance from us, nor the sense of our own utter nothingness in His vast creation, blind us to the facts which, however unable we may be to explain them, our hearts yet assure us to be true—that He, our Father, knows and loves and cares for us each one, and that whatsoever we shall ask the Father in the name of Christ, He will give it us.

“O Thou, by Whom we come to God,
The life, the truth, the way,
The path of prayer Thyself hath trod,
Lord, teach us how to pray !”

* From Matthew Henry.

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